

THE · POEMS · OF
WILLIAM · MORRIS

SELECTED & EDITED
BY · PERCY · R · COLWELL

H. E. Kaines



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of
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INTRODUCTION.

WILLIAM MORRIS (1834-1896).

THE MAN.

"You would think him one of the finest little fellows alive, with a touch of the incoherent, but a real man," wrote Dante Gabriel Rossetti to William Allingham, of his new follower and friend, William Morris. This characterization of the enthusiastic young poet seems to contain a subtle perception of the general qualities which underlay the whole life of the great craftsman and artist; he was a dreamer, ever, but always "a real man."

William Morris was born at Elm House, Clay Hill, Walthamstow, on the 24th of March, 1834. His father, William Morris, was a prosperous banker of Welsh descent; his mother, Emma Shelton, came of a sturdy old Worcestershire family of the middle class. Morris himself was the third of nine children and the eldest son. He was delicate in his early years, and, perhaps because of this, was a precocious book-worm, reading the *Waverley* novels at the age of four. From the very beginning he was noticed to possess a remarkable memory and power of observation.

When the lad was six years old, his family moved to Woodford Hall, which stood in a small park on the edge of Epping Forest. He lived an out-of-door life here, growing into a strong, healthy boy, and learning to love the birds and beasts of the forest, as well as the forest itself—a "great wood of hornbeams." He was born with a love for all things mediæval; and this love was fed by some of the customs of old England that were still observed in his father's house, Twelfth Night revels, a certain independence of life begot by the self-reliance of a large estate that kills its own meat and brews its own beer, and the old-fashioned relation between master and dependents. A suit of armour, in which he dressed himself for pony-riding, was one of his toys.

His love for architecture became evident at this early age; a visit to Canterbury Cathedral, when he was only eight years old, made a lasting impression. His memory for details of landscape and of architecture was wonderful.

The boy was sent to a small preparatory school at Walthamstow, kept by the Misses Arundale, when he was nine years old, and was kept in this school till the death of his father in 1847. The next four years he spent at Marlborough College, near Savernake Forest. The school system here was new, half-formed, and not at all rigid. The boy did nearly what he pleased, reading archæology and ecclesiastical architecture, and, although he was "strong and thickset," preferring long walks over the downs and exploration of old barrows, to cricket and foot-ball. A year with a private tutor intervened between Marlborough and the University of Oxford. Already Morris was a "dreamer of dreams"; he was forever making stories in his mind about people and places that were familiar to him; not ordinary stories, but dream stories, endeavouring to "make it something different from what it was."

In the years 1853-1855, Morris lived at Oxford as an undergraduate in Exeter College. Here, in the first two or three days of residence, he met Edward Burne-Jones, who was thenceforth his lifelong friend and comrade. The two young men were both designed for Holy Orders. Morris was, at this period, a complete aristocrat and high churchman. He conceived a very great contempt for the educational system and the intellectual life of Oxford, which had just been roused from its mediæval slumber by the Tractarian movement, and was lying open to the invasion of modern ideas. He seems to have lived his own life here quite as thoroughly and as satisfactorily as he had at Marlborough, but here he was not alone. He read aloud to Burne-Jones much old theology, the new gospel of Ruskin, the rich new poetry of Tennyson. He adopted *The Heir of Redclyffe* as his pattern of manhood; and in Thorpe's *Northern Mythology* he got the first glimpse of that great store of Teutonic legend which became, in later years, the dominant force in his life. A vacation journey to North France and Belgium, in 1854, gave him a new point of contact with the Middle Ages, in

a personal familiarity with the landscape and architecture of a region in which the name of every village recalls a page of Froissart or some chronicle of the older, heroic days. But, perhaps, of all the influences recorded during the Oxford days there is none more important than that of "the Brotherhood," which included, besides Morris and Jones, Fulford, Faulkner, Canon Dixon, Cormell Price, and Harry MacDonald. These men, from a similarity of tastes and aims, gradually drew together, with Godfrey Lushington of Balliol, and Vernon Lushington and Wilfred Heeley of Trinity College, Cambridge, to accomplish certain definite purposes. But several of them formed a little coterie about Morris during most of the college days; out of their talk of high things came high resolves, and among them the poet found his first appreciation.

There is something dramatic in Canon Dixon's account of the discovery of Morris's poetic talent, an unsuspected quality in his vigorous personality. Dixon and Price went into his room one evening and were greeted by Burne-Jones with the exciting exclamation that "Topsy" — so called because of "his mass of dark, curly hair and generally unkempt appearance" — was a great poet. They listened, then, to the reading of his first poem, *The Willow and the Red Cliff*, which was destroyed afterward, and never published. Dixon records that the poem was "perfectly original — and truly striking and beautiful." It was as if a prospector, looking for silver or copper, or almost any kind of metal, were to come at once upon a vein of virgin gold. "If this is poetry, it is very easy to write," said Morris. That was in 1855. Thereafter the writing of poems was his frequent pleasure; it was never his sole, nor, except for short periods, his chief occupation.

During the months that followed this discovery, he was influenced to some extent by Mrs. Browning, whose poetry at that time enjoyed its highest popularity. Her influence was remarked by his friends in several poems which he destroyed unpublished, and in a few which have survived, though not printed in any collection of his writings. At the same time, also, he discovered that he could write prose, and produced several prose romances which were afterward printed in *The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*.

This periodical was the result of a resolve of the Brotherhood "to found and conduct a Magazine of a really high order." *The Germ* had lately run its short course and stopped publication, but the influence of the Pre-Raphaelites had laid hold of the enthusiastic members of Morris's coterie, and it produced positive results in their work. The first number of the magazine appeared, January 1, 1856, and eleven monthly numbers followed, completing the year, before issue was suspended. Contributions were made by Bernard Cracroft and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, outside the Brotherhood. Morris's contributions were the most valuable, including *The Hollow Land*, and several other prose romances, and *Winter Weather*, *Hands*, and two or three more of the finest poems of his early inspiration.

Meanwhile, in 1855, Morris went, during the long vacation, on a walking tour in France with Burne-Jones and Fulford, and upon this journey Morris and Burne-Jones definitely decided to withdraw from their designs upon the clerical life, and to be artists, the one an architect, the other a painter. Morris apprenticed himself to Mr. Street, an architect in Oxford, on January 21, 1856. About this time, he added to his methods of recreation, wood-carving, clay-modelling, and illuminating, in all of which he seems to have been self-taught, following old models.

During this winter, Burne-Jones met Dante Gabriel Rossetti, at the Working Men's College in great Ormond Street, and soon introduced him to Morris. The tremendous personal magnetism of Rossetti quickly influenced both the young men who had already been enthusiastic worshippers of his genius. A close friendship sprang up. Both came to London and became pupils of the Pre-Raphaelite school, working under the personal direction of Rossetti. Morris gained, also, at this time, the friendship of Robert Browning, whose influence upon his early poetry is easily discernible, but the powerful personality of Rossetti dominated his life completely for the time being, disturbing his equanimity, withdrawing him from the study of architecture, and setting him, along with Burne-Jones, to learn the art of painting. He had a wonderful eye for colour, but could never draw the human figure successfully; and although he worked hard for a

year under the master's eye, he was not in entire harmony with himself during that time.

But this unsettled period was a time of beginnings. Besides the various forms of decoration at which he had already tried his hand, he was led, almost by chance, it seemed, into the designing of furniture. He took unfurnished rooms in Red Lion Square. The ugly, frail, modern furniture in the shops excited his disdain, and he started, with characteristic self-confidence, to design for himself a few pieces which should be both useful and decorative. These were built and ornamented by Morris and his friends. A curious incident of this period was the attempted decoration of the walls and ceiling of the library of the Oxford Union, which was undertaken by Morris, Burne-Jones, and Rossetti, Arthur Hughes, Spencer Stanhope, Val Prinsep, and Hungerford Pollen. None of them knew anything about fresco-painting, and their enthusiasm was balked by their ignorance of some of the first principles of the art; but the eager months spent at Oxford restored Morris to his usual equability of mind.

He spent the autumn of 1857 and the following winter in the university town, working variously. He added the designing of stained glass and embroidery to his list of crafts, and made the acquaintance of Swinburne who was at Balliol. In the following March he published his first volume of poems, *The Defence of Guenevere*. It was hailed with delight by his friends, and severely criticised by the reviews; it never gained much popularity, in spite of its splendid dramatic qualities and the genuineness of its mediævalism. He paid little attention to the criticism and went serenely about his own business, undisturbed by what people said of his work. He worked primarily for his own approval, always. Yet serenity could hardly be said to be a dominant quality of his temper. He was given to violent and picturesque outbursts of temper; and Burne-Jones writes of him, at this time, alarmed because, having fallen in love, he is so mild that in six months he has kicked out only one door panel.

While working on the Union Library at Oxford, Morris and Rossetti met Miss Jane Burden, a daughter of Mr. Robert Burden of Holywell Street. They were first attracted by the peculiar beauty of her face,—familiar in sev-

eral of Rossetti's paintings, — and persuaded her to sit as their model, but with Morris the attraction was much deeper, and he was married to her on April 26, 1859. The removal of Morris from the Bohemian life of the circle was the end of the active, united work of the Brotherhood.

In 1860, Morris built for himself Red House, near Upton, in Kent. His contempt for modern designs was a serious bar to the work of procuring furniture for his home, and led to the establishment of the firm of Morris & Co., in April, 1861. Rossetti and Peter Paul Marshall, designers, and Morris, Burne-Jones, Ford Madox Brown, Webb, and Faulkner, "craftsmen," were the members of the firm, and in the beginning did most of the work themselves. Besides the production of furniture for Red House, church decoration was their main employment. They occupied the old rooms at Red Lion Square, and advertised themselves as "Fine Art Workmen in Painting, Carving, Furniture and the Metals."

At Red House, Morris lived for four happy years. Two children were born here, Jane Alice in 1861, and May in 1862. During these years, he projected a cycle of poems upon the Trojan War, and wrote a great part of it, but it was never finished, and none of the single poems were published. The business of the firm increased. Morris furnished most of the capital and was, from the start, the most active of the partners. In 1865, he took a house in Queen Square, Bloomsbury, and moved thither both his family and his business.

A great deal of his time was occupied by the managing of the business, and by the actual work of the craftsman, but the brain of Morris, as well as his body, was indefatigable, and the intervals of toil were occupied by the composition of *The Earthly Paradise*. Ten years before, he had read Chaucer, and forthwith had become a reverent admirer of the great master of narrative poetry. Now he designed a long series of narrative poems, bound together by a prologue, as in *The Canterbury Tales*. He openly called Chaucer his master, but one can find little imitation in *The Earthly Paradise*. A very elaborate edition was designed, to be illustrated with a great number of wood-cuts by Burne-Jones, but the difficulties in the way of such a publication were, at that time, insurmountable, and it had to be given up. Morris worked



rapidly at the writing of the different tales that composed the series. The first volume was published by Ellis, in 1868, and the remaining parts in the year that followed. *The Life and Death of Jason* was originally designed to take a place in the series, but outgrew the plan, and was published by itself, earlier, gaining instant popularity and the applause of the critics, which stimulated Morris to the completion of *The Earthly Paradise*, and prepared a favourable reception for it.

In 1869, Morris began the study of Icelandic with Magnússon. Rossetti's influence had been waning for some time, and disappeared from his artistic life, perhaps with the rise of this vigorous Northern influence. With Magnússon, Morris published translations of the *Grettis Saga*, and several other Icelandic stories in the following months, notably a prose version of the *Volsunga Saga*, in 1870. After finishing *The Earthly Paradise*, he went to work with renewed vigour at the illumination of manuscripts, introducing new and original methods into this craft, in which he took peculiar delight.

In 1871, he bought Kelmscott Manor, on the Thames, thirty miles above Oxford. In the same year he made his first journey to Iceland, riding over a great part of the island, visiting the scenes of the historical sagas, and increasing at every step his enthusiastic veneration for this bleak land whose half-forgotten literature had already become, for him, the fountain-head of romance. This visit inspired in him further activity in his work with the sagas; it produced two lyrics, *Iceland First Seen* and the splendid lines on *Gunnar's Howe above the House at Lithend*, and it fixed upon him the hold of the semi-legendary, Icelandic life so that not only his artistic bent, but even his social theories were affected by it.

Morris was "feeling about" for new modes of expression at this time, and planned and started a novel of contemporary life, but he soon became disgusted with it and gave it up. The fragment was never published. In *Love is Enough*, which appeared in 1872, he abandons the method of epic narrative, which was gradually evolved in *The Earthly Paradise*, for a dramatic form resurrected from the end of the mediæval period in English literature. The "morality" displays an elaborate structure of four concentric planes of action, and is

remarkable for the technical care exhibited in the execution of the delicate task; but the very ingenuity displayed in the complicated experiment, in a measure, defeated any purpose of making the form a popular one.

The business of Morris & Co., meanwhile, was growing, so that the quarters in Queen Square were becoming crowded. Morris moved his family into a small house between Hammersmith and Turnham Green, leaving the whole of the Bloomsbury House to the firm. Although Faulkner, Webb, Marshall, Burne-Jones, Rossetti, and Madox Brown were all members of the original company, Morris had furnished practically all of the capital, and had, alone of the partners, devoted his entire time to the business. It involved, from the beginning, the whole of his resources, and, after the first doubtful years, had been put on a paying basis and gradually extended by his exertions. Now it became desirable to dissolve the partnership, which was done in 1875, and Morris conducted the business alone from that time, retaining the old name of "Morris & Co." By the original agreement, all the partners had equal rights to the assets of the firm — which at this time involved Morris's whole fortune. Rossetti, Madox Brown, and Marshall stood upon their legal right in this matter, while the other partners waived all claims. There was a complicated negotiation, which was finally settled without crippling Morris, but the dispute made a breach between Morris and the litigants, and finally destroyed the waning friendship between him and Rossetti. Webb and Burne-Jones continued to work for the firm as designers, and Morris, with his usual versatility, learned the art of dyeing, and added this branch of business, with the manufacture of decorative chintzes and tapestries, to the activities of the firm, which prospered greatly.

During all this he found time for travelling and writing. In 1873, he visited Italy, but found there little reason for enthusiasm; he had no use for the work of the Renaissance. In the same year, he made a second journey to Iceland, and in the following summer visited Belgium with his family. In 1875, he published *Three Northern Love Stories*, prose translations from the Icelandic, and a translation in verse of Virgil's *Æneid*. This latter was a work of immense labour and was

accomplished with some success. A year later appeared *Sigurd the Volsung*, in which the poet has wrought his will with the great Teutonic race epic.

After the publication of *Sigurd*, came a long period of comparative literary inactivity. The poet became absorbed in the man of affairs. He put his energies into the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, and the Eastern Question Association; he wrote political verse in his zeal for discussion over the Russo-Turkish War, and *Wake, London Lads*, for a Socialist meeting at Exeter Hall, in 1877. A journey to Iceland, and the addition of silk-weaving to the business of the firm, interrupted but little his Socialistic activities, but an attack of rheumatic gout compelled him to hold his energies in leash for a time. His first public lecture was delivered before the Trades Guild of Learning in December of 1877, upon "The Lesser Arts." In the following year, he moved his family into Kelmscott House, Hammersmith. He devoted himself to Socialism and to the weaving branch of his business which, altogether, developed so that it had to seek new quarters. In 1881, he moved it to Merton Abbey, in Surrey, on the river Wandle, where he was able to find room for all his different crafts in one place — dye-vats, glass-painting sheds, weaving room, print-room, tapestry looms, embroidery frames, and all the subsidiary industrial appliances.

For ten years, from 1880 to 1890, Socialism was the dominant factor in his life. He conducted *Justice*, the organ of the Democratic Federation. He lectured, or preached, as he called it, to countless gatherings of working-men, and to college men, too, on the occasions when he could get such an audience. He threw all his energy into the Socialistic propaganda, and was one of the leaders in the councils of the Federation. When the Federation became unwieldy, and harmony was no longer possible, Morris and a few other leaders drew away and formed the Socialist League, for the propagation of pure Socialism. He conducted *The Commonweal*, the organ of the League, contributing to it *The Pilgrims of Hope*, a series of poems containing passages of genuine worth, but in general full of journalistic faults. After a few years, came times of violence, particularly a dark Sunday in Trafalgar Square in 1886, when a Socialist meeting

was broken up by the police and military, and one man was killed. The possibilities of actual social revolution seemed more remote than ever. Morris's vision of a new mediæval Utopia grew dim, and the old bright dreams of romance, clamouring for expression, took possession of him once more. Gradually he withdrew from active Socialism, and became absorbed in other things, giving, once more, to literature a fair share of his energy, — not that he lost sympathy with Socialism, but that he ceased to be an active propagandist, and saw, perhaps, the impracticability of some of his ideas.

Socialism had taken hold of Morris by slow degrees. In Oxford, at first, he was a pronounced believer in aristocracy, but as he lived in London and saw the squalor of the working-men's life, he was irresistibly drawn into sympathy with their condition and a great desire to improve it. He was a craftsman himself and loved work. It seemed to him a terrible thing that any man should have to do work he hated. He believed that by teaching some knowledge of the arts to working-men they could be led to see beauty and to enjoy making beautiful things. His idea of social revolution was a restoration of the ancient Icelandic folk-rule with the violence of the old days eliminated by the influence of some subtle, spiritual emollient, law being replaced by custom, all men and women working because they enjoyed the work, a love of beauty animating the craftsman, and the labours of life become a joy because they were shared in universal good-fellowship. The fullest explanation of this visionary millennium may be found in *News from Nowhere*, which is a fascinating dream, however sceptical one may be as to the possibilities of its realization.

The *Odyssey* had long appealed to Morris because of its saga qualities. He translated it, not very successfully, and published the translation in 1887. About the same time he wrote a curious play, applying the method of the old "morality," to a modern farce, *The Tables Turned, or Nupkins Awakened*, which was, of course, of a Socialistic tendency. It was performed successfully two or three times in the open air, at Faringdon Road, Morris himself acting in it. In 1888, he published the *Dream of John Ball*, *Signs of Change*, a volume of lectures, and *The House of the Wolfings*, a prose romance of a distinctly Icelandic

tone. The Socialistic impulse had spent its active force in him by this time. His watchword, "Education toward revolution," was gradually bearing fruit, the teaching of the masses; gradually, there had gathered about him a group of skilled craftsmen, men who laboured in a dozen different lines and owned him as their master and inspiration; his decorative ideas were gradually permeating the English mind, his persistent, aggressive romanticism was bearing influence in various ways. At this time was formed the Arts and Crafts Exhibitions Society, first called the "Combined Arts." Now came the inception of his last essay in a new art, — the art of book-making.

He had, from the earliest days, decried the degeneracy of modern printing and binding, and had projected two or three big innovations only to find that they were impossible because of the inadequate means at the command of the publishers. When the *House of the Wolfings* was printed, he took a particular interest in its typography, and as the *Roots of the Mountains* followed in 1889 he continued to study the whole art of book-making with the purpose of starting the business himself. This was the inception of the Kelmscott Press, which he set up in 1890, at Hammersmith. The first book printed on it was *The Story of the Glittering Plain*, which was finished April 4, 1891, and published by Reeves & Turner, his regular publishers. Mr. Ellis was his partner in the Press. Morris designed the fonts of type for this press, following old Gothic models. He conducted, himself, the making of the paper for some of the books printed, and he designed many of the page ornaments and illuminated many of the initials with his own hand. Burne-Jones did much of the illustration and designing.

The next five years, the last of his life, were filled with the writing of prose romances, some of the most fascinating memorials of his literary production, with translations from the Icelandic and French, and with the activities of the Kelmscott Press. He published, with Quaritch, the Saga Library, and translated several French romances of the thirteenth century. On the press, he printed *Poems by the Way*, a collection of his own fugitive pieces, in 1891; Caxton's *Golden Legend*, and *Godefroy of Boulogne* followed in increasing magnificence. Other

smaller books were published, but the crowning achievement was the Kelmscott Chaucer, completed in June of 1896, four months before the founder's death. In 1895, the poet issued a translation of *Beowulf* which was not successful. He had had a rather serious illness in 1891, and was never as strong afterward. Twice he visited North France in search of health, but was not able to regain his old vigour. He died of congestion of the lungs. October 3, 1896, in his sixty-third year, not yet an old man, but with a record of work accomplished that would not shame a round century of life.

THE ARTIST.

Such are the bare facts of the life of the man, eloquent, in themselves, of the straightforwardness of mind, the singleness of purpose, the tremendous energy and ability which characterized him in every action and thought; but they need to be illuminated by a knowledge of his multifarious achievements in order to render clearer his peculiar and versatile genius. He was not a large man physically, but his small body was robust and stored full of condensed vitality and potential energy. He faced life, its joy and sorrow, and its eternal conflicts, with the confident eager fatalism of a Sea King of the Volsungs. His great head, with shaggy, dark, curling hair and beard framing the oval face, sensitive mouth half-hidden by silken mustache, wise, dreaming eyes, and, over all the magnificent forehead, wide and high and masculine,—this was the real index of his character. He was an independent soul, advised sometimes, but always going his own way in the end, with a masterful certainty that it was the best way for him. In like manner, he was absolutely honest in his dealings with other men, as a matter of course, because he was void of evil motives and, being true to himself, was not then “false to any man.” As an artist, he was like a gem with many facets, which is, intrinsically, of so fine a texture that no one of these requires much artificial polishing. He was a successful designer of furniture, carpets, hangings, of church decorations; himself a maker of beautiful tapestries, both woven and embroidered, a master in the dyeing of cloths, a carver of wood and stone, an adept in the making of

illuminated manuscript books, an expert in the typography and binding of printed books, a writer of prose romances that are absolutely original in their substance and fascinating in style, and a poet. The various decorative industries he raised to the artistic plane by the success with which he pursued his ideals; he revived the *art* of book-making which had fallen into oblivion; in poetry, alone of the fine arts, he was eminent, — he was the greatest narrative poet of his epoch. Fundamental, underlying all these abilities, was his inherent craftsmanship; he was skilled by divine endowment, deft-fingered, deft-minded, intuitively keen to see and use the best *means* for making a beautiful thing, — a tapestry, a room, or a poem. This was his genius, the basis of his achievement. But, on the other hand, guiding and inspiring all this intelligent power, elevating mere artisanship into genuine art, informing his whole life, and shaping all his theories, was the artistic impulse, the *passion* for making a beautiful thing. It was his dominant motive, in every branch of activity, and turned all his labour into pleasure. Even his Socialistic theories depended upon teaching to all men this same impulse, so that every one should find pleasure in working. The man was an artist to the depths of his soul.

The keynote to his art was mediævalism. Though his work-a-day interests were those of the nineteenth century, and of London, and he felt himself irretrievably of, and in sympathy with, the London artisans, his spirit was surely born in the Middle Ages, and then, by some kindly whim of Providence, withheld from incarnation until the Victorian era. He felt that England had been led astray by the Renaissance, from the path of artistic development which was natural and right for a Northern race to follow, that the spirit and methods of Gothic art, whose progress had been arrested while all its forms, save architecture, were in a crude state, were native and genuine, and all others were alien and artificial. Therefore his admiration for Gothic architecture amounted to a passion, and he returned to the Gothic type for his models in all forms of decoration. In painting and in stained glass, his particular genius lay in the use of brilliant and varied colour; his eye for colour was marvellous, always superior to his sense of form. When he came to typography, he based

his innovations upon a study of the old-time Gothic fonts; and in poetry he was preëminently romantic, both in method and in substance. He could not disregard the wealth of beauty in the Greek mythology, but it was the more romantic story that appealed to him, — the *Odyssey* rather than the *Iliad*; Jason, Bellerophon, Atalanta. Moreover his treatment of these was frankly mediæval in tone and setting.

THE POET.

“If a chap can’t compose an epic poem while he’s weaving tapestry, he had better shut up; he’ll never do any good at all.” This unconventional utterance is representative of William Morris’s attitude toward the art of poetry. He remarked that “all this talk of inspiration” was “nonsense,” and he regarded writing poetry as a craft, pure and simple. He had something to say; and to say it in the most beautiful form that he could command, was a matter of conscience with him. He worked at it with his mind, honestly and seriously, as he worked at a tapestry with his fingers; and he was naturally, as has been said before, an expert craftsman. The swiftness with which he composed was remarkable; he produced, sometimes, eight hundred lines in a single day, when writing *The Earthly Paradise*. Yet, in spite of this, he detested the business of correcting and remodelling lines once written, and would rarely do it; his verse, however, is never slovenly, — he was too good a workman for that. He was, in general, indifferent to published criticism, working to satisfy his own taste and careless of the approval or disapproval of outsiders. But he was not lazy in his workmanship. When the long prologue to *The Earthly Paradise* seemed to him defective, he rewrote the whole of it, changing its form completely.

The mechanics of his versification does not require much comment. He did not deal in blank verse, except in a few early instances, nor in rigid foreign metres and stanzas. He was fond of the Middle English alliterative metres, and was influenced by their freedom and native power in no inconsiderable degree. He consciously used the unrhymed verse of the Pre-Elizabethan dramatists in *Love is Enough*; but, in general, he preferred the iambic

measure, with four, five, six, or seven beats to the line, varying the foot, however, with a great deal of freedom, thus gaining a large degree of flexibility. Complications of stanza structure are avoided, and the lines usually rhyme in couplets or quatrains. In narrative verse, which is his characteristic form, the length of the stanza is irregular, governed entirely by the substance. Among his shorter poems, notably in the *Defence of Guenevere* volume, are a few of the old ballad form, with the trick of repeating lines and phrases, used very effectively. But, in general, his genius is for the rhythmic flow of sustained narrative verse, rather than for any small daintinesses or formalities. His ear, true as it was, was attuned to great and simple melodies, rather than to any complicated, delicate harmonies. There is always a ruggedness about his verse, a sort of Viking quality that is the exact opposite of prettiness. It shows little skill in the achievement of subtle sound effects, but it has a vague, haunting music of its own, in the mass, — a note of mystical pathos that is not merely in the sentiment; it is an intrinsic quality of the verse. His diction is archaic, always showing a strong preference for words long native, not shrinking from archaisms that are obsolete; but no tinge of affectation spoils the flavour of antiquity thus imparted. It was natural to Morris. He thought in such terms.

It is a commonplace to say that Morris was a Pre-Raphaelite, but not altogether true. He was *sui generis*. Though not properly a member of the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood, he was strongly influenced by them. His personal friendship for Rossetti and Ford Madox Brown drew him completely into their circle for a time; and even before this, his youthful enthusiasm had made him an ardent worshipper of their beliefs and achievements. But, after a little, he took his own way again, — a Pre-Raphaelite in his careful attention to detail, his love for rich and complex colour and design, but more than ever William Morris. This careful elaboration of detail and colour is characteristic of his poetry always. There are certain tricks of rhyme which he has in common with Rossetti, — particularly a fondness for long *e* rhymes, and for rhyming *-ē* with *-ly*. And he had the same belief in the beauty of the great range of human emotions in all their manifestations, as opposed to the rigid and narrow

selection of art subjects which marked the classical schools of the day.

He said of himself that he was "steeped in mediævalism," and that he was influenced most by the Icelandic sagas, the English and Scotch border ballads, and Froissart (in Berners's translation). Also he called Chaucer his master, because from Chaucer he received the inspiration to narrative poetry. But there is little resemblance to Chaucer that can be found in the works of Morris, except this of the general form, and the constructive device by which the different poems of *The Earthly Paradise* are bound together. There is a kinship with Keats sometimes apparent, notably in the fanciful elaboration of figure and detail with which Morris loves to embroider his narrative at every turn. He attributed to Mrs. Browning a great influence over his first poems, most of them unpublished; and the dramatic romances of Robert Browning have plainly shaped the method of many of the poems in his first volume. But all these factors are insignificant in the great mass of his work, which is essentially his own in method and in execution.

Most of the different bodies of myth and legend which are accessible to the modern scholar, were the storehouse from which he drew his material. Not Europe alone, but the Persian and Arabian romances, paid tribute to his power of assimilation and reproduction. The legends of northern Europe interested him most, however; and he read them all as a contemporary of Geoffrey Chaucer, so that he conceived the stories in the frame of mind which led certain old Flemish painters to picture scriptural characters with the costumes and scenery of Flanders in the time of Jacob Van Artevelde.

The earliest volume of his poetry, *The Defence of Guenevere*, drew from two sources, — Malory's *Morte D'Arthur* and the *Chronicles* of John Froissart. The volume contains many crudities of versification, many untrue rhymes and faulty rhythms, many harsh sound-sequences, but not a line that is insincere. It is startling in the grim honesty with which it reproduces the mediæval world. There is no modernizing of sentiment as in Tennyson's dealings with Malory's legends, nor any glorification of chivalry as in Walter Scott, but a relentless, dramatic expression of the spirit of Froissart's pages,

pitilessly human, so genuine that one cannot doubt its truth. Only four poems in the volume are from the Arthurian legend,—*The Defence of Guenevere*, *King Arthur's Tomb*, *The Chapel in Lyonesse*, and *Galahad, a Christmas Mystery*. Of these, the first two are intensely dramatic. The method is a mixture of narrative and monologue. The soul of Guenevere is laid bare with terrible truth and power, and the writhing human passion of the lines is tremendous; and for this central figure there is supplied indirectly a setting and background of the court life of early Britain, with an interweaving of motives that shows no small power of dramatic construction. The other poems in the volume are mostly from Froissart, some relating actual incidents from his pages, but most of them expressing dramatically, by the monologue or informal dialogue method, some situation typical of life in the period of the long struggle between France and England under the Plantagenets. The landscape and the people come straight from the pages of the old canon; and the grim, reckless hardihood of the time, its treachery and violence, and its bravery, are all preserved. Some few of the poems are altogether of Dreamland, but even of these the mysticism is mediæval; and the lyric passion of *Praise of my Lady* and *Summer Dawn* belongs to the Middle Ages. Altogether, the book is a wonderful recrudescence of genuine mediævalism. It is uniquely romantic, and far more dramatic than *The Earthly Paradise*. Its freshness and genuineness compensate for its faults of crudeness; and, since Sir Thomas Malory, no man has dealt so manfully and frankly with Guenevere and Launcelot and Arthur, as this young poet has.

The Life and Death of Jason, coming ten years later, displayed a considerable change in the poet's balance of powers. The crudeness of rhyme, the harsh lines, have disappeared. With them has gone some of the intense dramatic power; but the poet has leaped into his mastery of the narrative form. The old Greek story of the Argonauts is elaborated into a long romantic poem. The narrative is adorned with pictures rich in diverse colours, carefully wrought in every minute detail, and varied with beautiful lyrics. In spite of the length of the poem, the interest never flags. The verse is strong yet flexible, not fluid, yet sweeping steadily onward like a wave of the

sea, bearing the burden of the narrative without monotony and without effort. As for the tale itself, it has the familiar Hellenic properties of scenery and deities, but they are seen through the eyes of a man untouched by the Renaissance. The Colchian River bears Flemish dromonds on its stream, and the strain of Northern melancholy runs through the songs of Orpheus. The poet was fond of fancying that a direct line of Greek legend had descended through the Middle Ages, by way of the Varangian guards of the Roman emperors, and other wandering Teutons who had returned to their Northern fastnesses laden with the mythology of pagan Greece, and he coloured Greek stories as if this fancy were a fact.

In *The Earthly Paradise*, which was published very soon after *The Life and Death of Jason*, the stories that come from Greek sources are treated in the same spirit as are those that come from German and French romances of the mediæval period, and from Oriental sources; but in the tales that are taken from the Northern mythology the strong influence of Icelandic sagas appears. The spirit of *The Fostering of Aslaug* belongs to the heroic days,—simpler, less mystical, than the feudal period; and *The Lovers of Gudrun* is pure epic in spirit,—a fine rendering of the magnificent *Laxdæla Saga*. This growth from the romantic to the epic method of narrative is marked by greater directness, and a distinct lessening of the mysticism which is prevalent in the purely romantic tales, such as *Ogier the Dane*. The characters are larger, more heroic, and more dramatically human. The poet is no longer looking through Gothic windows of variegated hues; but through a perfectly clear medium he sees the primitive world, with its few men and women stirred by the elemental passions to heroic activities; and this world he reproduces faithfully and with a profound simplicity that is closely akin to the spirit of the saga men themselves.

This epic spirit, apparent even in some of the late-written Greek stories of *The Earthly Paradise*, culminated in *Sigurd the Volsung*, which was composed at a time when Morris was steeped in Icelandic lore and associations. This is no mere translation; it is the story of the *Volsunga Saga* arranged and done into English verse,—

the grandest long narrative poem of the nineteenth century. The poem lacks unity; it is really a double epic, — the story of Sigmund, Sigurd's father, and the story of Sigurd. But, in spite of this constructive fault, the power of the poem is unfailing from beginning to end. Magnificent fatalism, profound tragic passages, and heroic achievements abound; the heroes of the elder world play their full parts; Sigurd and Brynhild are human — to the full stature of demigods; Grimhild and Gudrun, Gunnar and Hogni, live greatly through good days and evil, or die heroically; and over all the strife, and the joy and sorrow, the greed, the hate, the love, and the heroism, preside the stern form of Woden, "All-Father," and the dim relentless Norns: all this, to be sure, is native to the story; but to translate it into the living English, to render it into verse adequate to its grandeur, its pathos, its tragic heroism, — this is a poetic achievement of very high rank.

The metre of *Sigurd* is of the iambic form, seven stresses to the line, in rhymed couplets. A great deal of freedom in the substitution of irregular feet gives flexibility and variety to the sonorous rhythm which is truly heroic in its dignity. It is a fit vehicle for the great epic story, and does not fail at the flame-ringed summit of Hindfell, in the peaceful beauty of Lyndale, or in the tumultuous burg of the Niblung children; the death of Brynhild is related with sublime solemnity, and the brave story of the last fight of the Niblung warriors, in Atli's hall, is splendidly, gloriously tragic.

In *Sigurd*, the poet reached the summit of his achievement. The story inspired him to his greatest success. His story-telling gift thereafter found expression in prose romances which were a return in spirit to the earlier days. One volume of poetry, published much later, was made up mostly of short lyric pieces. Some of them were rhymes made for Socialist songs and the rest collected from various sources and composed at different periods of his activity. There is no new note struck. The one long poem in the volume, *Love is Enough*, had been published separately, some time before.

It seems beyond question that Morris must be ranked, as a poet, by *The Earthly Paradise*, *Jason*, and *Sigurd*. The fresh dramatic intensity of his earliest volume, the

exquisite beauty and the haunting melancholy of the lyrics scattered through all his work,—these are slight compared with the volume and excellence of his narrative poetry. In this field alone he is first of the Victorians. His verse is not always smooth. It is never merry, never humorous, nor ever laboriously playful; there are few single lines that stick in one's memory. It is always dignified and serious, full of colour and pictorial detail, and it moves with a breadth of sustained power that makes it peculiarly fitted for the telling of tales. It is frankly Pagan, in spirit, touched with the haunting melancholy of the Northern races,—the "Thought of the Otherwhere," that

"Walleth weirdly along thro' all music or song
From a Teuton's voice or string."

Yet it is a brave melancholy, a heroic pessimism, —

"There dwelt men merry hearted and in hope exceeding great,
Met the good days and the evil as they went the way of fate."

This was the spirit of the poet. A "dreamer of dreams," he called himself in the beautiful *Apology*, in the beginning of *The Earthly Paradise*, and "the idle singer of an empty day," both here and in the intimately personal *L'Envoi*; he felt his kinship to the old days, and strove, not vainly, to reconstruct their beauty. Nor is it an idle thing to have drawn together the world's beautiful stories and told them in enduring verse for the delight of men. He was sincere, this man, and, like the Baresarks of old, he strove to the last day of his life; their toil was war, his the creation of beauty. It is fitting to close with the words of his biographer, "As a poet and artist . . . he gave his best to the world quite simply, without ostentation and without concealment; and with the world, as a still living influence, what was permanent in it remains."

PERCY ROBERT COLWELL.

LAWRENCEVILLE, N.J., Jan. 13, 1904.

EARLY ROMANTIC POEMS.

EARLY ROMANTIC POEMS.¹



THE DEFENCE OF GUENEVERE.

BUT, knowing now that they would have her speak,
She threw her wet hair backward from her brow,
Her hand close to her mouth touching her cheek,

As though she had had there a shameful blow,
And feeling it shameful to feel ought but shame
All through her heart, yet felt her cheek burned so,

She must a little touch it ; like one lame
She walked away from Gauwaine, with her head
Still lifted up ; and on her cheek of flame

The tears dried quick ; she stopped at last and said :
“ O knights and lords, it seems but little skill
To talk of well-known things past now and dead.

“ God wot I ought to say, I have done ill,
And pray you all forgiveness heartily !
Because you must be right, such great lords ; still

“ Listen, suppose your time were come to die,
And you were quite alone and very weak ;
Yea, laid a dying while very mightily

“ The wind was ruffling up the narrow streak
Of river through your broad lands running well :
Suppose a hush should come, then some one speak :

“One of these cloths is heaven, and one is hell,
Now choose one cloth for ever; which they be,
I will not tell you, you must somehow tell

“Of your own strength and mightiness; here, see!’
Yea, yea, my lord, and you to ope your eyes,
At foot of your familiar bed to see

“A great God’s angel standing, with such dyes,
Not known on earth, on his great wings, and hands,
Held out two ways, light from the inner skies

“Showing him well, and making his commands
Seem to be God’s commands, moreover, too,
Holding within his hands the cloths on wands;

“And one of these strange choosing cloths was blue,
Wavy and long, and one cut short and red;
No man could tell the better of the two.

“After a shivering half-hour you said,
‘God help! heaven’s colour, the blue;’ and he said,
‘Hell.’
Perhaps you then would roll upon your bed,

“And cry to all good men that loved you well,
‘Ah Christ! if only I had known, known, known;’
Launcelot went away, then I could tell,

“Like wisest man how all things would be, moan,
And roll and hurt myself, and long to die,
And yet fear much to die for what was sown.

“Nevertheless you, O Sir Gauwaine, lie,
Whatever may have happened through these years,
God knows I speak truth, saying that you lie.”

Her voice was low at first, being full of tears,
But as it cleared, it grew full loud and shrill,
Growing a windy shriek in all men’s ears,

A ringing in their startled brains, until
She said that Gauwaine lied, then her voice sunk,
And her great eyes began again to fill,

Though still she stood right up, and never shrunk,
But spoke on bravely, glorious lady fair!
Whatever tears her full lips may have drunk,

She stood, and seemed to think, and wrung her hair,
Spoke out at last with no more trace of shame,
With passionate twisting of her body there:

"It chanced upon a day that Launcelot came
To dwell at Arthur's court: at Christmas-time
This happened; when the heralds sung his name,

"Son of King Ban of Benwick,' seemed to chime
Along with all the bells that rang that day,
O'er the white roofs, with little change of rhyme.

"Christmas and whitened Winter passed away,
And over me the April sunshine came,
Made very awful with black hail-clouds, yea

"And in the Summer I grew white with flame,
And bowed my head down — Autumn, and the sick
Sure knowledge things would never be the same,

"However often Spring might be most thick
Of blossoms and buds, smote on me, and I grew
Careless of most things, let the clock tick, tick,

"To my unhappy pulse, that beat right through
My eager body; while I laughed out loud,
And let my lips curl up at false or true,

"Seemed cold and shallow without any cloud.
Behold, my judges, then the cloths were brought:
While I was dizzied thus, old thoughts would crowd,

"Belonging to the time ere I was bought
By Arthur's great name and his little love,
Must I give up for ever then, I thought,

"That which I deemed would ever round me move
Glorifying all things; for a little word,
Scarce ever meant at all, must I now prove

"Stone-cold for ever? Pray you, does the Lord
Will that all folks should be quite happy and good?
I love God now a little, if this cord

"Were broken, once for all what striving could
Make me love anything in earth or heaven?
So day by day it grew, as if one should

"Slip slowly down some path worn smooth and even,
Down to a cool sea on a summer day;
Yet still in slipping there was some small leaven

"Of stretched hands catching small stones by the way,
Until one surely reached the sea at last,
And felt strange new joy as the worn head lay

"Back, with the hair like sea-weed; yea all past
Sweat of the forehead, dryness of the lips,
Washed utterly out by the dear waves o'ercast,

"In the lone sea, far off from any ships!
Do I not know now of a day in Spring?
No minute of that wild day ever slips

"From out my memory; I hear thrushes sing,
And wheresoever I may be, straightway
Thoughts of it all come up with most fresh sting:

"I was half mad with beauty on that day,
And went without my ladies all alone,
In a quiet garden walled round every way;

"I was right joyful of that wall of stone,
That shut the flowers and trees up with the sky,
And trebled all the beauty: to the bone,

"Yea right through to my heart, grown very shy
With weary thoughts, it pierced, and made me glad;
Exceedingly glad, and I knew verily,

"A little thing just then had made me mad;
I dared not think, as I was wont to do,
Sometimes, upon my beauty; if I had

"Held out my long hand up against the blue,
And, looking on the tenderly darken'd fingers,
Thought that by rights one ought to see quite through,

"There, see you, where the soft still light yet lingers,
Round by the edges; what should I have done,
If this had joined with yellow spotted singers,

"And startling green drawn upward by the sun?
But shouting, loosed out, see now! all my hair,
And trancedly stood watching the west wind run

"With faintest half-heard breathing sound—why there
I lose my head e'en now in doing this;
But shortly listen—In that garden fair

"Came Launcelot walking; this is true, the kiss
Wherewith we kissed in meeting that spring day,
I scarce dare talk of the remember'd bliss,

"When both our mouths went wandering in one way,
And aching sorely, met among the leaves;
Our hands being left behind strained far away.

"Never within a yard of my bright sleeves
Had Launcelot come before—and now, so nigh!
After that day why is it Guenevere grieves?

"Nevertheless you, O Sir Gauwaine, lie,
Whatever happened on through all those years,
God knows I speak truth, saying that you lie.

"Being such a lady could I weep these tears
If this were true? A great queen such as I
Having sinn'd this way, straight her conscience sears;

"And afterwards she liveth hatefully,
Slaying and poisoning, certes never weeps,—
Gauwaine be friends now, speak me lovingly.

"Do I not see how God's dear pity creeps
All through your frame, and trembles in your mouth?
Remember in what grave your mother sleeps,

"Buried in some place far down in the south,
Men are forgetting as I speak to you;
By her head sever'd in that awful drouth

"Of pity that drew Agravaine's fell blow;
I pray your pity! let me not scream out
For ever after, when the shrill winds blow

"Through half your castle-locks! let me not shout
For ever after in the winter night
When you ride out alone! in battle-rout

"Let not my rusting tears make your sword light!
Ah! God of mercy, how he turns away!
So, ever must I dress me to the fight,

"So — let God's justice work! Gauwaine, I say,
See me hew down your proofs: yea all men know
Even as you said how Mellyagraunce one day,

"One bitter day in *la Fausse Garde*, for so
All good knights held it after, saw —
Yea, sirs, by cursed unknighly outrage; though

"You, Gauwaine, held his word without a flaw,
This Mellyagraunce saw blood upon my bed —
Whose blood then pray you? is there any law

"To make a queen say why some spots of red
Lie on her coverlet? or will you say
'Your hands are white, lady, as when you wed,

"'Where did you bleed?' and must I stammer out 'Nay,
I blush indeed, fair lord, only to rend
My sleeve up to my shoulder, where there lay

"'A knife-point last night:' so must I defend
The honour of the Lady Guenevere?
Not so, fair lords, even if the world should end

"This very day, and you were judges here
Instead of God. Did you see Mellyagraunce
When Launcelot stood by him? what white fear

"Curdled his blood, and how his teeth did dance,
His side sink in? as my knight cried and said,
'Slayer of unarm'd men, here is a chance!

"'Setter of traps, I pray you guard your head,
By God I am so glad to fight with you,
Stripper of ladies, that my hand feels lead

"'For driving weight; hurrah now! draw and do,
For all my wounds are moving in my breast,
And I am getting mad with waiting so.'

"He struck his hands together o'er the beast,
Who fell down flat, and grovell'd at his feet,
And groan'd at being slain so young — 'at least,'

"My knight said, 'Rise you, sir, who are so fleet
At catching ladies, half-arm'd will I fight,
My left side all uncovered!' then I weet,

"Up sprang Sir Mellyagraunce with great delight
Upon his knave's face; not until just then
Did I quite hate him, as I saw my knight

"Along the lists look to my stake and pen
With such a joyous smile, it made me sigh
From agony beneath my waist-chain, when

"The fight began, and to me they drew nigh;
Ever Sir Launcelot kept him on the right,
And traversed warily, and ever high

"And fast leapt caitiff's sword, until my knight
Sudden threw up his sword to his left hand,
Caught it, and swung it; that was all the fight,

"Except a spout of blood on the hot land;
For it was hottest summer; and I know
I wonder'd how the fire, while I should stand,

"And burn, against the heat, would quiver so,
Yards above my head; thus these matters went:
Which things were only warnings of the woe

"That fell on me. Yet Mellyagraunce was shent,
For Mellyagraunce had fought against the Lord;
Therefore, my lords, take heed lest you be blent

"With all this wickedness; say no rash word
Against me, being so beautiful; my eyes,
Wept all away the grey, may bring some sword

"To drown you in your blood; see my breast rise,
Like waves of purple sea, as here I stand;
And how my arms are moved in wonderful wise,

"Yea also at my full heart's strong command,
See through my long throat how the words go up
In ripples to my mouth; how in my hand

"The shadow lies like wine within a cup
Of marvellously colour'd gold; yea now
This little wind is rising, look you up,

"And wonder how the light is falling so
Within my moving tresses: will you dare,
When you have looked a little on my brow,

"To say this thing is vile? or will you care
For any plausible lies of cunning woof,
When you can see my face with no lie there

"For ever? am I not a gracious proof —
'But in your chamber Launcelot was found' —
Is there a good knight then would stand aloof,

"When a queen says with gentle queenly sound:
'O true as steel come now and talk with me,
I love to see your step upon the ground

"'Unwavering, also well I love to see
That gracious smile light up your face, and hear
Your wonderful words, that all mean verily

“‘The thing they seem to mean : good friend, so dear
To me in everything, come here to-night,
Or else the hours will pass most dull and drear ;

“‘If you come not, I fear this time I might
Get thinking over much of times gone by,
When I was young, and green hope was in sight :

“‘For no man cares now to know why I sigh ;
And no man comes to sing me pleasant songs,
Nor any brings me the sweet flowers that lie

“‘So thick in the gardens ; therefore one so longs
To see you, Launcelot ; that we may be
Like children once again, free from all wrongs

“‘Just for one night.’ Did he not come to me ?
What thing could keep true Launcelot away
If I said, ‘Come ?’ there was one less than three

“In my quiet room that night, and we were gay ;
Till sudden I rose up, weak, pale, and sick,
Because a bawling broke our dream up, yea

“I looked at Launcelot’s face and could not speak,
For he looked helpless too, for a little while ;
Then I remember how I tried to shriek,

“And could not, but fell down ; from tile to tile
The stones they threw up rattled o’er my head
And made me dizzier ; till within a while

“My maids were all about me, and my head
On Launcelot’s breast was being soothed away
From its white chattering, until Launcelot said —

“By God ! I will not tell you more to-day,
Judge any way you will — what matters it ?
You know quite well the story of that fray,

“How Launcelot still’d their bawling, the mad fit
That caught up Gauwaine — all, all, verily,
But just that which would save me ; these things flit.

"Nevertheless you, O Sir Gauwaine, lie,
Whatever may have happen'd these long years,
God knows I speak truth, saying that you lie!

"All I have said is truth, by Christ's dear tears."
She would not speak another word, but stood
Turn'd sideways; listening, like a man who hears

His brother's trumpet sounding through the wood
Of his foes' lances. She lean'd eagerly,
And gave a slight spring sometimes, as she could

At last hear something really; joyfully
Her cheek grew crimson, as the headlong speed
Of the roan charger drew all men to see,
The knight who came was Launcelot at good need.

KING ARTHUR'S TOMB.²

Hot August noon — already on that day
Since sunrise through the Wiltshire downs, most sad
Of mouth and eye, he had gone leagues of way;
Ay and by night, till whether good or bad

He was, he knew not, though he knew perchance
That he was Launcelot, the bravest knight
Of all who since the world was, have borne lance,
Or swung their swords in wrong cause or in right.

Nay, he knew nothing now, except that where
The Glastonbury gilded towers shine,
A lady dwelt, whose name was Guenevere;
This he knew also; that some fingers twine,

Not only in a man's hair, even his heart,
(Making him good or bad I mean,) but in his life,
Skies, earth, men's looks and deeds, all that has part,
Not being ourselves, in that half-sleep, half-strife,

(Strange sleep, strange strife,) that men call living; so
Was Launcelot most glad when the moon rose,
Because it brought new memories of her — “Lo,
Between the trees a large moon, the wind lows

“Not loud, but as a cow begins to low,
Wishing for strength to make the herdsman hear:
The ripe corn gathereth dew; yea, long ago,
In the old garden life, my Guenevere

“Loved to sit still among the flowers, till night
Had quite come on, hair loosen'd, for she said,
Smiling like heaven, that its fairness might
Draw up the wind sooner to cool her head.

“Now while I ride how quick the moon gets small,
As it did then — I tell myself a tale
That will not last beyond the whitewashed wall,
Thoughts of some joust must help me through the vale,

“Keep this till after — How Sir Gareth ran
A good course that day under my Queen's eyes,
And how she sway'd laughing at Dinadan —
No — back again, the other thoughts will rise,

“And yet I think so fast 't will end right soon —
Verily then I think, that Guenevere,
Made sad by dew and wind, and tree-barred moon,
Did love me more than ever, was more dear

“To me than ever, she would let me lie
And kiss her feet, or, if I sat behind,
Would drop her hand and arm most tenderly,
And touch my mouth. And she would let me wind

“Her hair around my neck, so that it fell
Upon my red robe, strange in the twilight
With many unnamed colours, till the bell
Of her mouth on my cheek sent a delight

“Through all my ways of being; like the stroke
Wherewith God threw all men upon the face
When he took Enoch, and when Enoch woke
With a changed body in the happy place.

“ Once, I remember, as I sat beside,
She turn’d a little, and laid back her head,
And slept upon my breast; I almost died
In those night-watches with my love and dread,

“ There lily-like she bow’d her head and slept,
And I breathed low, and did not dare to move,
But sat and quiver’d inwardly, thoughts crept,
And frighten’d me with pulses of my Love.

“ The stars shone out above the doubtful green
Of her bodice, in the green sky overhead;
Pale in the green sky were the stars I ween,
Because the moon shone like a star she shed

“ When she dwelt up in heaven a while ago,
And ruled all things but God: the night went on,
The wind grew cold, and the white moon grew low,
One hand had fallen down, and now lay on

“ My cold stiff palm; there were no colours then
For near an hour, and I fell asleep
In spite of all my striving, even when
I held her whose name-letters make me leap.

“ I did not sleep long, feeling that in sleep
I did some loved one wrong, so that the sun
Had only just arisen from the deep
Still land of colours, when before me one

“ Stood whom I knew, but scarcely dared to touch,
She seemed to have changed so in the night;
Moreover she held scarlet lilies, such
As Maiden Margaret bears upon the light

“ Of the great church walls, nathless did I walk
Through the fresh wet woods, and the wheat that morn,
Touching her hair and hand and mouth, and talk
Of love we held, nigh hid among the corn.

“ Back to the palace, ere the sun grew high,
We went, and in a cool green room all day
I gazed upon the arras giddily,
Where the wind set the silken kings a-sway.

"I could not hold her hand, or see her face;
For which may God forgive me! but I think,
Howsoever, that she was not in that place."
These memories Launcelot was quick to drink;

And when these fell, some paces past the wall,
There rose yet others, but they wearied more,
And tasted not so sweet; they did not fall
So soon, but vaguely wrenched his strained heart sore

In shadowy slipping from his grasp: these gone,
A longing followed; if he might but touch
That Guenevere at once! Still night, the lone
Grey horse's head before him vex'd him much,

In steady nodding over the grey road —
Still night, and night, and night, and emptied heart
Of any stories; what a dismal load
Time grew at last, yea, when the night did part,

And let the sun flame over all, still there
The horse's grey ears turn'd this way and that,
And still he watch'd them twitching in the glare
Of the morning sun, behind them still he sat,

Quite wearied out with all the wretched night,
Until about the dustiest of the day,
On the last down's brow he drew his rein in sight
Of the Glastonbury roofs that choke the way.

And he was now quite giddy as before,
When she slept by him, tired out, and her hair
Was mingled with the rushes on the floor,
And he, being tired too, was scarce aware

Of her presence; yet as he sat and gazed,
A shiver ran throughout him, and his breath
Came slower, he seem'd suddenly amazed,
As though he had not heard of Arthur's death.

This for a moment only, presently
He rode on giddy still, until he reach'd
A place of apple-trees, by the thorn-tree
Wherefrom St. Joseph in the days past preached.

Dazed there he laid his head upon a tomb,
Not knowing it was Arthur's, at which sight
One of her maidens told her, "He is come,"
And she went forth to meet him; yet a blight

Had settled on her, all her robes were black,
With a long white veil only; she went slow,
As one walks to be slain, her eyes did lack
Half her old glory, yea, alas! the glow

Had left her face and hands; this was because
As she lay last night on her purple bed,
Wishing for morning, grudging every pause
Of the palace clocks, until that Launcelot's head

Should lie on her breast, with all her golden hair
Each side — when suddenly the thing grew drear,
In morning twilight, when the grey downs bare
Grew into lumps of sin to Guenevere.

At first she said no word, but lay quite still,
Only her mouth was open, and her eyes
Gazed wretchedly about from hill to hill;
As though she asked, not with so much surprise

As tired disgust, what made them stand up there
So cold and grey. After, a spasm took
Her face, and all her frame, she caught her hair,
All her hair, in both hands, terribly she shook,

And rose till she was sitting in the bed,
Set her teeth hard, and shut her eyes and seem'd
As though she would have torn it from her head,
Natheless she dropp'd it, lay down, as she deem'd

It matter'd not whatever she might do —
O Lord Christ! pity on her ghastly face!
Those dismal hours while the cloudless blue
Drew the sun higher — He did give her grace;

Because at last she rose up from her bed,
And put her raiment on, and knelt before
The blessed rood, and with her dry lips said,
Muttering the words against the marble floor:

"Unless you pardon, what shall I do, Lord,
But go to hell? and there see day by day
Foul deed on deed, hear foulest word on word,
For ever and ever, such as on the way

"To Camelot I heard once from a churl,
That curled me up upon my jennet's neck
With bitter shame; how then, Lord, should I curl
For ages and for ages? dost thou reckon

"That I am beautiful, Lord, even as you
And your dear mother? why did I forget
You were so beautiful, and good, and true,
That you loved me so, Guenevere? O yet

"If even I go to hell, I cannot choose
But love you, Christ, yea, though I cannot keep
From loving Launcelot; O Christ! must I lose
My own heart's love? see, though I cannot weep,

"Yet am I very sorry for my sin;
Moreover, Christ, I cannot bear that hell,
I am most fain to love you, and to win
A place in heaven some time — I cannot tell —

"Speak to me, Christ! I kiss, kiss, kiss your feet;
Ah! now I weep!" — The maid said, "By the tomb
He waiteth for you, lady," coming fleet,
Not knowing what woe filled up all the room.

So Guenevere rose and went to meet him there,
He did not hear her coming, as he lay
On Arthur's head, till some of her long hair
Brush'd on the new-cut stone — "Well done! to pray

"For Arthur, my dear lord, the greatest king
That ever lived." "Guenevere! Guenevere!
Do you not know me, are you gone mad? fling
Your arms and hair about me, lest I fear

"You are not Guenevere, but some other thing."
"Pray you forgive me, fair lord Launcelot!
I am not mad, but I am sick; they cling,
God's curses, unto such as I am; not

"Ever again shall we twine arms and lips."

"Yea, she is mad: thy heavy law, O Lord,
Is very tight about her now, and grips
Her poor heart, so that no right word

"Can reach her mouth; so, Lord, forgive her now,
That she not knowing what she does, being mad,
Kills me in this way — Guenevere, bend low
And kiss me once! for God's love kiss me! sad

"Though your face is, you look much kinder now;
Yea once, once for the last time kiss me, lest I die."
"Christ! my hot lips are very near his brow,
Help me to save his soul! — Yea, verily,

"Across my husband's head, fair Launcelot!
Fair serpent mark'd with V upon the head!
This thing we did while yet he was alive,
Why not, O twisting knight, now he is dead?

"Yea, shake! shake now and shiver! if you can
Remember anything for agony,
Pray you remember how when the wind ran
One cool spring evening through fair aspen-tree,

"And elm and oak about the palace there,
The king came back from battle, and I stood
To meet him, with my ladies, on the stair,
My face made beautiful with my young blood."

"Will she lie now, Lord God?" "Remember too,
Wrung heart, how first before the knights there came
A royal bier, hung round with green and blue,
About it shone great tapers with sick flame.

"And thereupon Lucius, the Emperor,
Lay royal-robed, but stone-cold now and dead,
Not able to hold sword or sceptre more,
But not quite grim; because his cloven head

"Bore no marks now of Launcelot's bitter sword,
Being by embalmers deftly solder'd up;
So still it seem'd the face of a great lord,
Being mended as a craftsman mends a cup.

"Also the heralds sung rejoicingly
To their long trumpets; 'Fallen under shield,
Here lieth Lucius, King of Italy,
Slain by Lord Launcelot in open field.'

"Thereat the people shouted 'Launcelot!'
And through the spears I saw you drawing nigh,
You and Lord Arthur — nay, I saw you not,
But rather Arthur, God would not let die,

"I hoped, these many years; he should grow great,
And in his great arms still encircle me,
Kissing my face, half blinded with the heat
Of king's love for the queen I used to be.

"Launcelot, Launcelot, why did he take your hand,
When he had kissed me in his kingly way?
Saying, 'This is the knight whom all the land
Calls Arthur's banner, sword, and shield to-day;

"'Cherish him, love.' Why did your long lips cleave
In such strange way unto my fingers then?
So eagerly glad to kiss, so loath to leave
When you rose up? Why among helmed men

"Could I always tell you by your long strong arms,
And sway like an angel's in your saddle there?
Why sicken'd I so often with alarms
Over the tilt-yard? Why were you more fair

"Than aspens in the autumn at their best?
Why did you fill all lands with your great fame,
So that Breuse even, as he rode, fear'd lest
At turning of the way your shield should flame?

"Was it nought then, my agony and strife?
When as day passed by day, year after year,
I found I could not live a righteous life!
Didst ever think queens held their truth for dear?

"O, but your lips say, 'Yea, but she was cold
Sometimes, always uncertain as the spring;
When I was sad she would be overbold,
Longing for kisses;' when war-bells did ring,

"The back-toll'd bells of noisy Camelot" —

"Now, Lord God, listen! listen, Guenevere,
Though I am weak just now, I think there's not
A man who dares to say, 'You hated her,

"And left her moaning while you fought your fill
In the daisied meadows;' lo you her thin hand,
That on the carven stone cannot keep still,
Because she loves me against God's command,

"Has often been quite wet with tear on tear,
Tears Launcelot keeps somewhere, surely not
In his own heart, perhaps in Heaven, where
He will not be these ages —" "Launcelot!

"Loud lips, wrung heart! I say when the bells rang,
The noisy back-toll'd bells of Camelot,
There were two spots on earth, the thrushes sang
In the lonely gardens where my love was not,

"Where I was almost weeping; I dared not
Weep quite in those days, lest one maid should say,
In tittering whispers, 'Where is Launcelot
To wipe with some kerchief those tears away?'

"Another answer sharply with brows knit,
And warning hand up, scarcely lower though,
'You speak too loud, see you, she heareth it,
This tigress fair has claws, as I well know,

"As Launcelot knows too, the poor knight! well-a-day!
Why met he not with Iseult from the West,
Or better still, Iseult of Brittany,
Perchance indeed quite ladyless were best.'

"Alas, my maids, you loved not overmuch
Queen Guenevere, uncertain as sunshine
In March; forgive me! for my sin being such,
About my whole life, all my deeds did twine,

"Made me quite wicked; as I found out then,
I think; in the lonely palace where each morn
We went, my maids and I, to say prayers when
They sang mass in the chapel on the lawn.

“And every morn I scarce could pray at all,
For Launcelot's red-golden hair would play,
Instead of sunlight, on the painted wall,
Mingled with dreams of what the priest did say;

“Grim curses out of Peter and of Paul;
Judging of strange sins in Leviticus;
Another sort of writing on the wall,
Scored deep across the painted heads of us.

“Christ sitting with the woman at the well,
And Mary Magdalen repenting there,
Her dimmed eyes scorch'd and red at sight of hell
So hardly 'scaped, no gold light on her hair.

“And if the priest said anything that seemed
To touch upon the sin they said we did, —
(This in their teeth) they looked as if they deem'd
That I was spying what thoughts might be hid

“Under green-cover'd bosoms, heaving quick
Beneath quick thoughts; while they grew red with
shame,
And gazed down at their feet — while I felt sick,
And almost shriek'd if one should call my name.

“The thrushes sang in the lone garden there
But where you were the birds were scared I trow —
Clanging of arms about pavilions fair,
Mixed with the knights' laughs; there, as I well know,

“Rode Launcelot, the king of all the band,
And scowling Gauwaine, like the night in day,
And handsome Gareth, with his great white hand
Curl'd round the helm-crest, ere he join'd the fray;

“And merry Dinadan with sharp dark face,
All true knights loved to see; and in the fight
Great Tristram, and though helmed you could trace
In all his bearing the frank noble knight;

“And by him Palomydes, helmet off,
He fought, his face brush'd by his hair,

Red heavy swinging hair; he fear'd a scoff
So overmuch, though what true knight would dare

"To mock that face, fretted with useless care,
And bitter useless striving after love?
O Palomydes, with much honour bear
Beast Glatysaunt upon your shield, above

"Your helm that hides the swinging of your hair,
And think of Iseult, as your sword drives through
Much mail and plate—O God, let me be there
A little time, as I was long ago!

"Because stout Gareth lets his spear fall low,
Gauwaine and Launcelot, and Dinadan
Are helm'd and waiting; let the trumpets go!
Bend over, ladies, to see all you can!

"Clench teeth, dames, yea, clasp hands, for Gareth's spear
Throws Kay from out his saddle, like a stone
From a castle-window when the foe draws near—
'Iseult'—Sir Dinadan rolleth overthrown.

"'Iseult'—again—the pieces of each spear
Fly fathoms up, and both the great steeds reel;
'Tristram for Iseult!' 'Iseult' and 'Guenevere!'
The ladies' names bite verily like steel.

"They bite—bite me, Lord God!—I shall go mad,
Or else die kissing him, he is so pale,
He thinks me mad already, O bad! bad!
Let me lie down a little while and wail."

"No longer so, rise up, I pray you, love,
And slay me really, then we shall be heal'd,
Perchance, in the aftertime by God above."
"Banner of Arthur—with black-bended shield

"Sinister-wise across the fair gold ground!
Here let me tell you what a knight you are,
O sword and shield of Arthur! you are found
A crooked sword, I think, that leaves a scar

“On the bearer’s arm, so be he thinks it straight,
Twisted Malay’s crease beautiful blue-grey,
Poison’d with sweet fruit; as he found too late,
My husband Arthur, on some bitter day!

“O sickle cutting hemlock the day long!
That the husbandman across his shoulder hangs,
And, going homeward about evensong,
Dies the next morning, struck through by the fangs!

“Banner, and sword, and shield, you dare not pray to die,
Lest you meet Arthur in the other world,
And, knowing who you are, he pass you by,
Taking short turns that he may watch you curl’d,

“Body and face and limbs in agony,
Lest he weep presently and go away,
Saying, ‘I loved him once,’ with a sad sigh —
Now I have slain him, Lord, let me go too, I pray.
[LAUNCELOT *falls*.

“Alas! alas! I know not what to do,
If I run fast it is perchance that I
May fall and stun myself, much better so,
Never, never again! not even when I die.”

LAUNCELOT, *on awaking*.

“I stretch’d my hands towards her and fell down,
How long I lay in swoon I cannot tell:
My head and hands were bleeding from the stone,
When I rose up, also I heard a bell.”

SIR PETER HARPDON'S END.³*In an English Castle in Poictou.*

SIR PETER HARPDON, *a Gascon knight in the English service,* and JOHN CURZON, *his lieutenant.*

JOHN CURZON.

OF those three prisoners, that before you came
We took down at St. John's hard by the mill,
Two are good masons; we have tools enough,
And you have skill to set them working.

SIR PETER.

So—

What are their names?

JOHN CURZON.

Why, Jacques Aquadent,
And Peter Plombiere, but,—

SIR PETER.

What colour'd hair
Has Peter now? has Jacques got bow legs?

JOHN CURZON.

Why, sir, you jest—what matters Jacques' hair,
Or Peter's legs to us?

SIR PETER.

O! John, John, John!
Throw all your mason's tools down the deep well,
Hang Peter up and Jacques; they're no good,
We shall not build, man.

JOHN CURZON, *going.*

Shall I call the guard
To hang them, sir? and yet, sir, for the tools,

We 'd better keep them still; sir, fare you well.

[Muttering as he goes.]

What have I done that he should jape at me?

And why not build? the walls are weak enough,

And we 've two masons and a heap of tools.

[Goes, still muttering.]

SIR PETER.

To think a man should have a lump like that

For his lieutenant! I must call him back,

Or else, as surely as St. George is dead,

He 'll hang our friends the masons — here, John! John!

JOHN CURZON.

At your good service, sir.

SIR PETER.

Come now, and talk

This weighty matter out; there — we 've no stone

To mend our walls with, — neither brick nor stone.

JOHN CURZON.

There is a quarry, sir, some ten miles off.

SIR PETER.

We are not strong enough to send ten men

Ten miles to fetch us stone enough to build,

In three hours' time they would be taken or slain,

The cursed Frenchmen ride abroad so thick.

JOHN CURZON.

But we can send some villaynes to get stone.

SIR PETER.

Alas! John, that we cannot bring them back,

They would go off to Clisson or Sanxere,

And tell them we were weak in walls and men,

Then down go we; for, look you, times are changed,

And now no longer does the country shake

At sound of English names; our captains fade

From off our muster-rolls. At Lusac Bridge

I daresay you may even yet see the hole
 That Chandos beat in dying; far in Spain
 Pembroke is prisoner; Phelton prisoner here;
 Manny lies buried in the Charterhouse;
 Oliver Clisson turn'd these years ago;
 The Captal died in prison; and, over all,
 Edward the prince lies underneath the ground,
 Edward the king is dead at Westminster;
 The carvers smooth the curls of his long beard.
 Everything goes to rack — eh! and we too.
 Now, Curzon, listen; if they come, these French,
 Whom have I got to lean on here, but you?
 A man can die but once, will you die then,
 Your brave sword in your hand, thoughts in your heart
 Of all the deeds we have done here in France —
 And yet may do? So God will have your soul,
 Whoever has your body.

JOHN CURZON.

Why, sir, I
 Will fight till the last moment, until then
 Will do whate'er you tell me. Now I see
 We must e'en leave the walls; well, well, perhaps
 They're stronger than I think for; pity, though!
 For some few tons of stone, if Guesclin comes.

SIR PETER.

Farewell, John, pray you watch the Gascons well,
 I doubt them.

JOHN CURZON.

Truly, sir, I will watch well. [Goes.

SIR PETER.

Farewell, good lump! and yet, when all is said,
 'T is a good lump. Why then, if Guesclin comes;
 Some dozen stones from his petrariae,
 And, under shelter of his crossbows, just
 An hour's steady work with pickaxes,
 Then a great noise — some dozen swords and glaives
 A-playing on my basnet all at once,
 And little more cross purposes on earth

For me.

Now this is hard : a month ago,
And a few minutes' talk had set things right
'Twixt me and Alice ; — if she had a doubt,
As, (may Heaven bless her !) I scarce think she had,
'T was but their hammer, hammer in her ears,
Of " how Sir Peter fail'd at Lusac Bridge : "
And " how he was grown moody of late days ; "
And " how Sir Lambert, " (think now !) " his dear friend,
His sweet, dear cousin, could not but confess
That Peter's talk tended towards the French,
Which he, " (for instance Lambert) " was glad of,
Being, " (Lambert, you see) " on the French side."

Well,

If I could but have seen her on that day,
Then, when they sent me off !

I like to think,
Although it hurts me, makes my head twist, what,
If I had seen her, what I should have said,
What she, my darling, would have said and done.
As thus perchance —

To find her sitting there,
In the window-seat, not looking well at all,
Crying perhaps, and I say quietly ;
" Alice ! " she looks up, chokes a sob, looks grave,
Changes from pale to red, but, ere she speaks,
Straightway I kneel down there on both my knees,
And say : " O lady, have I sinn'd, your knight ?
That still you ever let me walk alone
In the rose garden, that you sing no songs
When I am by, that ever in the dance
You quietly walk away when I come near ?
Now that I have you, will you go, think you ? "

Ere she could answer I would speak again,
Still kneeling there.

" What ! they have frightened you,
By hanging burs ; and clumsily carven puppets,
Round my good name ; but afterwards, my love,
I will say what this means ; this moment, see !
Do I kneel here, and can you doubt me ? Yea, "
(For she would put her hands upon my face,)
" Yea, that is best, yea feel, love, am I changed ? "

And she would say : " Good knight, come, kiss my lips !"
And afterwards as I sat there would say :

" Please a poor silly girl by telling me
What all those things they talk of really were,
For it is true you did not help Chandos
And true, poor love ! you could not come to me
When I was in such peril."

I should say :

" I am like Balen, all things turn to blame —
I did not come to you ? At Bergerath
The constable had held us close shut up,
If from the barriers I had made three steps,
I should have been but slain ; at Lusac, too,
We struggled in a marish half the day,
And came too late at last : you know, my love,
How heavy men and horses are all arm'd.
All that Sir Lambert said was pure, unmix'd,
Quite groundless lies ; as you can think, sweet love."

She, holding tight my hand as we sat there,
Started a little at Sir Lambert's name,
But otherwise she listen'd scarce at all
To what I said. Then with moist, weeping eyes,
And quivering lips, that scarcely let her speak,
She said, " I love you."

Other words were few,
The remnant of that hour ; her hand smooth'd down
My foolish head ; she kiss'd me all about
My face, and through the tangles of my beard
Her little fingers crept.

O ! God, my Alice,
Not this good way : my lord but sent and said
That Lambert's sayings were taken at their worth,
Therefore that day I was to start, and keep
This hold against the French ; and I am here, —

[*Looks out of the window.*]

A sprawling lonely yard with rotten walls,
And no one to bring aid if Guesclin comes,
Or any other.

There's a pennon now !

At last.

But not the constable's, whose arms,
I wonder, does it bear? Three golden rings
On a red ground; my cousin's by the rood!
Well, I should like to kill him, certainly,
But to be kill'd by him — [A trumpet sounds.
That's for a herald;
I doubt this does not mean assaulting yet.

Enter JOHN CURZON.

What says the herald of our cousin, sir?

JOHN CURZON.

So please you, sir, concerning your estate,
He has good will to talk with you.

SIR PETER.

Outside,
I'll talk with him, close by the gate St. Ives.
Is he unarm'd?

JOHN CURZON.

Yea, sir, in a long gown.

SIR PETER.

Then bid them bring me hither my furr'd gown
With the long sleeves, and under it I'll wear,
By Lambert's leave, a secret coat of mail;
And will you lend me, John, your little axe?
I mean the one with Paul wrought on the blade?
And I will carry it inside my sleeve,
Good to be ready always — you, John, go
And bid them set up many suits of arms,
Bows, archgays, lances, in the base-court, and
Yourself, from the south postern setting out,
With twenty men, be ready to break through
Their unguarded rear when I cry out "St. George!"

JOHN CURZON.

How, sir! will you attack him unawares,
And slay him unarm'd?

SIR PETER.

Trust me, John, I know
 The reason why he comes here with sleeved gown,
 Fit to hide axes up. So, let us go. *[They go.]*

*Outside the castle by the great gate; SIR LAMBERT and SIR
 PETER seated; guards attending each, the rest of SIR
 LAMBERT'S men drawn up about a furlong off.*

SIR PETER.

And if I choose to take the losing side
 Still, does it hurt you?

SIR LAMBERT.

O! no hurt to me;
 I see you sneering, "Why take trouble then,
 Seeing you love me not?" Look you, our house
 (Which, taken altogether, I love much)
 Had better be upon the right side now,
 If, once for all, it wishes to bear rule
 As such a house should: cousin, you're too wise
 To feed your hope up fat, that this fair France
 Will ever draw two ways again; this side
 The French, wrong-headed, all a-jar
 With envious longings; and the other side
 The order'd English, orderly led on
 By those two Edwards through all wrong and right,
 And muddling right and wrong to a thick broth
 With that long stick, their strength. This is all changed,
 The true French win, on either side you have
 Cool-headed men, good at a tilting-match,
 And good at setting battles in array,
 And good at squeezing taxes at due time;
 Therefore by nature we French being here
 Upon our own big land — *[SIR PETER laughs aloud.]*
 Well Peter! well!

What makes you laugh?

SIR PETER.

Hearing you sweat to prove
 All this I know so well; but you have read
 The siege of Troy?

SIR LAMBERT.

O! yea, I know it well.

SIR PETER.

There! they were wrong, as wrong as men could be;
For, as I think, they found it such delight
To see fair Helen going through their town:
Yea, any little common thing she did
(As stooping to pick a flower) seem'd so strange,
So new in its great beauty, that they said:
"Here we will keep her living in this town,
Till all burns up together." And so, fought,
In a mad whirl of knowing they were wrong;
Yea, they fought well, and ever, like a man
That hangs legs off the ground by both his hands,
Over some great height, did they struggle sore,
Quite sure to slip at last; wherefore, take note
How almost all men, reading that sad siege,
Hold for the Trojans; as I did at least,
Thought Hector the best knight a long way:

Now

Why should I not do this thing that I think;
For even when I come to count the gains,
I have them my side; men will talk, you know,
(We talk of Hector, dead so long ago,)
When I am dead, of how this Peter clung
To what he thought the right; of how he died,
Perchance, at last, doing some desperate deed
Few men would care do now, and this is gain
To me, as ease and money is to you.
Moreover, too, I like the straining game
Of striving well to hold up things that fall;
So one becomes great; see you! in good times
All men live well together, and you, too,
Live dull and happy — happy? not so quick,
Suppose sharp thoughts begin to burn you up.
Why then, but just to fight as I do now,
A halter round my neck, would be great bliss.
O! I am well off.

[*Aside.*

Talk, and talk, and talk,
I know this man has come to murder me,
And yet I talk still.

SIR LAMBERT.

If your side were right,
You might be, though you lost; but if I said,
"You are a traitor, being, as you are,
Born Frenchman." What are Edwards unto you,
Or Richards?

SIR PETER.

Nay, hold there, my Lambert, hold!
For fear your zeal should bring you to some harm,
Don't call me traitor.

SIR LAMBERT.

Furthermore, my knight,
Men call you slippery on your losing side.
When at Bordeaux I was ambassador,
I heard them say so, and could scarce say "Nay."
[*He takes hold of something in his sleeve, and rises.*]

SIR PETER, *rising*.

They lied — and you lie, not for the first time.
What have you got there, fumbling up your sleeve,
A stolen purse?

SIR LAMBERT.

Nay, liar in your teeth!
Dead liar too; St. Denis and St. Lambert!
[*Strikes at SIR PETER with a dagger.*]

SIR PETER, *striking him flatlings with his axe.*

How thief! thief! thief! so there, fair thief, so there,
St. George Guienne! glaives for the castellan!
You French, you are but dead, unless you lay
Your spears upon the earth. St. George Guienne!

Well done, John Curzon, how he has them now.

In the Castle.

JOHN CURZON.

WHAT shall we do with all these prisoners, sir?

SIR PETER.

Why put them all to ransom, those that can
Pay anything, but not too light though, John,
Seeing we have them on the hip: for those
That have no money, that being certified,
Why turn them out of doors before they spy;
But bring Sir Lambert guarded unto me.

JOHN CURZON.

I will, fair sir.

[*He goes.*]

SIR PETER.

I do not wish to kill him,
Although I think I ought; he shall go mark'd,
By all the saints, though!

Enter LAMBERT guarded.

Now Sir Lambert, now!

What sort of death do you expect to get,
Being taken this way?

SIR LAMBERT

Cousin! cousin! think!

I am your own blood; may God pardon me!
I am not fit to die; if you knew all,
All I have done since I was young and good.
O! you would give me yet another chance,
As God would, that I might wash all clear out
By serving you and Him! Let me go now!
And I will pay you down more golden crowns
Of ransom than the king would!

SIR PETER.

Well, stand back,

And do not touch me! No, you shall not die,
Nor yet pay ransom. You, John Curzon, cause
Some carpenters to build a scaffold, high,
Outside the gate; when it is built, sound out
To all good folks, "Come, see a traitor punish'd!"
Take me my knight, and set him up thereon,
And let the hangman shave his head quite clean,
And cut his ears off close up to the head;

And cause the minstrels all the while to play
Soft music, and good singing ; for this day
Is my high day of triumph ; is it not,
Sir Lambert ?

SIR LAMBERT.

Ah ! on your own blood,
Own name, you heap this foul disgrace ? you dare,
With hands and fame thus sullied, to go back
And take the lady Alice —

SIR PETER.

Say her name
Again, and you are dead, slain here by me.
Why should I talk with you, I'm master here,
And do not want your schooling ; is it not
My mercy that you are not dangling dead
There in the gateway with a broken neck ?

SIR LAMBERT.

Such mercy ! why not kill me then outright ?
To die is nothing ; but to live that all
May point their fingers ! yea, I'd rather die.

JOHN CURZON.

Why, will it make you any uglier man
To lose your ears ? they're much too big for you,
You ugly Judas !

SIR PETER.

Hold, John ! [To LAMBERT.

That's your choice,
To die, mind ! Then you shall die — Lambert mine,
I thank you now for choosing this so well,
It saves me much perplexity and doubt ;
Perchance an ill deed too, for half I count
This sparing traitors is an ill deed.

Well,

Lambert, die bravely, and we're almost friends.

SIR LAMBERT, *grovelling*.

O God ! this is a fiend and not a man ;

Will some one save me from him? help, help, help!
I will not die.

SIR PETER.

Why, what is this I see?
A man who is a knight, and bandied words
So well just now with me, is lying down,
Gone mad for fear like this! So, so, you thought
You knew the worst, and might say what you pleased.
I should have guess'd this from a man like you.
Eh! righteous Job would give up skin for skin,
Yea, all a man can have for simple life,
And we talk fine, yea, even a hound like this,
Who needs must know that when he dies, deep hell
Will hold him fast for ever — so fine we talk,
“Would rather die —” all that. Now sir, get up!
And choose again: shall it be head sans ears,
Or trunk sans head?

John Curzon, pull him up!
What, life then? go and build the scaffold, John.

Lambert, I hope that never on this earth
We meet again; that you'll turn out a monk,
And mend the life I give you, so, farewell,
I'm sorry you're a rascal. John, despatch.

In the French Camp before the Castle.

SIR PETER *prisoner*, GUESCLIN, CLISSON, SIR LAMBERT.

SIR PETER.

So now is come the ending of my life;
If I could clear this sickening lump away
That sticks in my dry throat, and say a word,
Guesclin might listen.

GUESCLIN.

Tell me, fair sir knight,
If you have been clean liver before God,
And then you need not fear much; as for me,
I cannot say I hate you, yet my oath,
And cousin Lambert's ears here clench the thing.

SIR PETER.

I knew you could not hate me, therefore I
Am bold to pray for life; 't will harm your cause
To hang knights of good name, harms here in France
I have small doubt, at any rate hereafter
Men will remember you another way
Than I should care to be remember'd, ah!
Although hot lead runs through me for my blood,
All this falls cold as though I said, "Sweet lords,
Give back my falcon!"

See how young I am,
Do you care altogether more than France,
Say rather one French faction, than for all
The state of Christendom? a gallant knight,
As (yea, by God!) I have been, is more worth
Than many castles; will you bring this death,
For a mere act of justice, on my head?

Think how it ends all, death! all other things
Can somehow be retrieved, yea, send me forth
Naked and maimed, rather than slay me here;
Then somehow will I get me other clothes,
And somehow will I get me some poor horse,
And, somehow clad in poor old rusty arms,
Will ride and smite among the serried glaives,
Fear not death so; for I can tilt right well,
Let me not say "I could"; I know all tricks,
That sway the sharp sword cunningly; ah you,
You, my Lord Clisson, in the other days
Have seen me learning these, yea, call to mind,
How in the trodden corn by Chartres town,
When you were nearly swooning from the back
Of your black horse, those three blades slid at once
From off my sword's edge; pray for me, my lord!

CLISSON.

Nay, this is pitiful, to see him die.
My Lord the Constable, I pray you note
That you are losing some few thousand crowns
By slaying this man; also think; his lands
Along the Garonne river lie for leagues,
And are right rich, a many mills he has,

Three abbeyes of grey monks do hold of him,
 Though wishing well for Clement, as we do;
 I know the next heir, his old uncle, well,
 Who does not care two deniers for the knight
 As things go now, but slay him, and then see,
 How he will bristle up like any perch,
 With curves of spears. What! do not doubt, my lord,
 You'll get the money, this man saved my life,
 And I will buy him for two thousand crowns;
 Well, five then—eh! what! “No” again? well then,
 Ten thousand crowns?

GUESCLIN.

My sweet lord, much I grieve
 I cannot please you, yea, good sooth, I grieve
 This knight must die, as verily he must;
 For I have sworn it, so men take him out,
 Use him not roughly.

SIR LAMBERT, *coming forward.*

Music, do you know,
 Music will suit you well, I think, because
 You look so mild, like Laurence being grill'd;
 Or perhaps music soft and slow, because
 This is high day of triumph unto me,
 Is it not, Peter?

You are frighten'd, though,
 Eh! you are pale, because this hurts you much,
 Whose life was pleasant to you, not like mine,
 You ruin'd wretch! Men mock me in the streets,
 Only in whispers loud, because I am
 Friend of the constable; will this please you,
 Unhappy Peter? once a-going home,
 Without my servants, and a little drunk,
 At midnight through the lone dim lamp-lit streets,
 A whore came up and spat into my eyes,
 Rather to blind me than to make me see,
 But she was very drunk, and tottering back,
 Even in the middle of her laughter fell
 And cut her head against the pointed stones,
 While I lean'd on my staff, and look'd at her,
 And cried, being drunk.

Girls would not spit at you.

You are so handsome, I think verily
Most ladies would be glad to kiss your eyes,
And yet you will be hung like a cur dog
Five minutes hence, and grow black in the face,
And curl your toes up. Therefore I am glad.

Guess why I stand and talk this nonsense now,
With Guesclin getting ready to play chess,
And Clisson doing something with his sword,
I can't see what, talking to Guesclin though,
I don't know what about, perhaps of you.
But, cousin Peter, while I stroke your beard,
Let me say this, I'd like to tell you now
That your life hung upon a game of chess,
That if, say, my squire Robert here should beat,
Why you should live, but hang if I beat him ;
Then guess, clever Peter, what I should do then ;
Well, give it up ? why Peter, I should let
My squire Robert beat me, then you would think
That you were safe, you know ; Eh ? not at all,
But I should keep you three days in some hold,
Giving you salt to eat, which would be kind,
Considering the tax there is on salt ;
And afterwards should let you go, perhaps ?
No I should not, but I should hang you, sir,
With a red rope in lieu of mere grey rope.

But I forgot, you have not told me yet
If you can guess why I talk nonsense thus,
Instead of drinking wine while you are hang'd ?
You are not quick at guessing, give it up.
This is the reason ; here I hold your hand,
And watch you growing paler, see you writhe,
And this, my Peter, is a joy so dear,
I cannot by all striving tell you how
I love it, nor I think, good man, would you
Quite understand my great delight therein ;
You, when you had me underneath you once,
Spat as it were, and said, " Go take him out,"
(That they might do that thing to me whereat,
E'en now this long time off I could well shriek,)
And then you tried forget I ever lived,
And sunk your hating into other things ;

While I — St. Denis! though, I think you'll faint,
 Your lips are grey so; yes, you will, unless
 You let it out and weep like a hurt child;
 Hurrah! you do now. Do not go just yet,
 For I am Alice, am right like her now;
 Will you not kiss me on the lips, my love? —

CLISSON.

You filthy beast, stand back and let him go,
 Or by God's eyes I'll choke you. [*Kneeling to* SIR PETER.
 Fair sir knight,

I kneel upon my knees and pray to you
 That you would pardon me for this your death;
 God knows how much I wish you still alive,
 Also how heartily I strove to save
 Your life at this time; yea, He knows quite well,
 (I swear it, so forgive me!) how I would,
 If it were possible, give up my life
 Upon this grass for yours; fair knight, although,
 He knowing all things knows this thing too, well,
 Yet when you see His face some short time hence,
 Tell Him I tried to save you.

SIR PETER.

O! my lord,
 I cannot say this is as good as life,
 But yet it makes me feel far happier now,
 And if at all, after a thousand years,
 I see God's face, I will speak loud and bold,
 And tell Him you were kind, and like Himself;
 Sir, may God bless you!

Did you note how I
 Fell weeping just now? pray you, do not think
 That Lambert's taunts did this, I hardly heard
 The base things that he said, being deep in thought
 Of all things that have happen'd since I was
 A little child; and so at last I thought
 Of my true lady: truly, sir, it seem'd
 No longer gone than yesterday, that this
 Was the sole reason God let me be born
 Twenty-five years ago, that I might love
 Her, my sweet lady, and be loved by her;

This seem'd so yesterday, to-day death comes,
And is so bitter strong, I cannot see
Why I was born.

But as a last request,
I pray you, O kind Clisson, send some man,
Some good man, mind you, to say how I died,
And take my last love to her: fare-you-well,
And may God keep you; I must go now, lest
I grow too sick with thinking on these things;
Likewise my feet are wearied of the earth,
From whence I shall be lifted upright soon. [*As he goes.*]

Ah me! shamed too, I wept at fear of death;
And yet not so, I only wept because
There was no beautiful lady to kiss me
Before I died, and sweetly wish good speed
From her dear lips. O for some lady, though
I saw her ne'er before; Alice, my love,
I do not ask for; Clisson was right kind,
If he had been a woman, I should die
Without this sickness: but I am all wrong,
So wrong and hopelessly afraid to die.
There, I will go.

My God! how sick I am,
If only she could come and kiss me now.

The Hotel de la Barde, Bordeaux.

*The LADY ALICE DE LA BARDE, looking out of a
window into the street.*

No news yet! surely, still he holds his own:
That garde stands well; I mind me passing it
Some months ago; God grant the walls are strong!
I heard some knights say something yestereve,
I tried hard to forget: words far apart
Struck on my heart something like this; one said,
"What eh! a Gascon with an English name,
Harpdon?" then nought, but afterwards, "Poictou."
As one who answers to a question ask'd,
Then carelessly regretful came, "No, no,"
Whereto in answer loud and eagerly,
One said, "Impossible! Christ, what foul play!"

And went off angrily ; and while thenceforth
 I hurried gaspingly afraid, I heard,
 "Guesclin"; "Five thousand men-at-arms"; "Clisson."
 My heart misgives me it is all in vain
 I send these succours ; and in good time there !
 Their trumpet sounds, ah ! here they are ; good knights,
 God up in Heaven keep you.

If they come

And find him prisoner — for I can't believe
 Guesclin will slay him, even though they storm —
 (The last horse turns the corner.)

God in Heaven !

What have I got to thinking of at last !
 That thief I will not name is with Guesclin,
 Who loves him for his lands. My love ! my love !
 O, if I lose you after all the past,
 What shall I do ?

I cannot bear the noise

And light street out there, with this thought alive,
 Like any curling snake within my brain ;
 Let me just hide my head within these soft
 Deep cushions, there to try and think it out.

[Lying in the window-seat.]

I cannot hear much noise now, and I think
 That I shall go to sleep : it all sounds dim
 And faint, and I shall soon forget most things ;
 Yea, almost that I am alive and here ;
 It goes slow, comes slow, like a big mill-wheel
 On some broad stream, with long green weeds a-sway,
 And soft and slow it rises and it falls,
 Still going onward.

Lying so, one kiss,

And I should be in Avalon asleep,
 Among the poppies, and the yellow flowers ;
 And they should brush my cheek, my hair being spread
 Far out among the stems ; soft mice and small
 Eating and creeping all about my feet,
 Red shod and tired ; and the flies should come
 Creeping o'er my broad eyelids unafraid ;
 And there should be a noise of water going,
 Clear blue, fresh water breaking on the slates,
 Likewise the flies should creep — God's eyes ! God help,
 A trumpet ? I will run fast, leap adown

The slippery sea-stairs, where the crabs fight.

Ah!

I was half dreaming, but the trumpet's true;
He stops here at our house. The Clisson arms?
Ah, now for news. But I must hold my heart,
And be quite gentle till he is gone out;
And afterwards, — but he is still alive,
He must be still alive.

Enter a SQUIRE of CLISSON'S.

Good day, fair sir,
I give you welcome, knowing whence you come.

SQUIRE.

My Lady Alice de la Barde, I come
From Oliver Clisson, knight and mighty lord,
Bringing you tidings: I make bold to hope
You will not count me villain, even if
They wring your heart; nor hold me still in hate.
For I am but a mouthpiece after all,
A mouthpiece, too, of one who wishes well
To you and yours.

ALICE.

Can you talk faster, sir,
Get over all this quicker? fix your eyes
On mine, I pray you, and whate'er you see
Still go on talking fast, unless I fall,
Or bid you stop.

SQUIRE.

I pray your pardon then,
And, looking in your eyes, fair lady, say
I am unhappy that your knight is dead.
Take heart, and listen! let me tell you all.
We were five thousand goodly men-at-arms,
And scant five hundred had he in that hold;
His rotten sand-stone walls were wet with rain,
And fell in lumps wherever a stone hit;
Yet for three days about the barrier there
The deadly glaives were gather'd, laid across,
And push'd and pull'd; the fourth our engines came;
But still amid the crash of falling walls,

And roar of lombards, rattle of hard bolts,
The steady bow-strings flash'd, and still stream'd out
St. George's banner, and the seven swords,
And still they cried, "St. George Guienne!" until
Their walls were flat as Jericho's of old,
And our rush came, and cut them from the keep.

ALICE.

Stop, sir, and tell me if you slew him then,
And where he died, if you can really mean
That Peter Harpdon, the good knight, is dead?

SQUIRE.

Fair lady, in the base-court—

ALICE.

What base-court?

What do you talk of? Nay, go on, go on;
'T was only something gone within my head:
Do you not know, one turns one's head round quick,
And something cracks there with sore pain? go on,
And still look at my eyes.

SQUIRE.

Almost alone,

There in the base-court fought he with his sword,
Using his left hand much, more than the wont
Of most knights now-a-days; our men gave back,
For wheresoever he hit a downright blow,
Some one fell bleeding, for no plate could hold
Against the sway of body and great arm;
Till he grew tired, and some man (no! not I,
I swear not I, fair lady, as I live!)
Thrust at him with a glaive between the knees,
And threw him; down he fell, sword undermost;
Many fell on him, crying out their cries,
Tore his sword from him, tore his helm off, and—

ALICE.

Yea, slew him; I am much too young to live,
Fair God, so let me die.

You have done well,
 Done all your message gently, pray you go,
 Our knights will make you cheer; moreover, take
 This bag of franks for your expenses. [*The SQUIRE kneels.*
 But

You do not go; still looking at my face,
 You kneel! what, squire, do you mock me then?
 You need not tell me who has set you on,
 But tell me only, 't is a made-up tale.
 You are some lover may-be, or his friend;
 Sir, if you loved me once, or your friend loved,
 Think, is it not enough that I kneel down
 And kiss your feet? your jest will be right good
 If you give in now, carry it too far,
 And 't will be cruel; not yet? but you weep
 Almost, as though you loved me; love me then,
 And go to Heaven by telling all your sport,
 And I will kiss you then with all my heart,
 Upon the mouth; O! what can I do then
 To move you?

SQUIRE.

Lady fair, forgive me still!
 You know I am so sorry, but my tale
 Is not yet finish'd:

So they bound his hands,
 And brought him tall and pale to Guesclin's tent,
 Who, seeing him, leant his head upon his hand,
 And ponder'd awhile, afterwards, looking up—
 Fair dame, what shall I say?

ALICE.

Yea, I know now,
 Good squire, you may go now with my thanks.

SQUIRE.

Yet, lady, for your own sake I say this,
 Yea, for my own sake, too, and Clisson's sake.
 When Guesclin told him he must be hanged soon,
 Within a while he lifted up his head
 And spoke for his own life; not crouching, though,
 As abjectly afraid to die, nor yet

Sullenly brave as many a thief will die ;
Nor yet as one that plays at japes with God :
Few words he spoke ; not so much what he said
Moved us, I think, as, saying it, there played
Strange tenderness from that big soldier there
About his pleading ; eagerness to live
Because folk loved him, and he loved them back,
And many gallant plans unfinish'd now
For ever. Clisson's heart, which may God bless !
Was moved to pray for him, but all in vain ;
Wherefore I bring this message :

That he waits,
Still loving you, within the little church
Whose windows, with the one eye of the light
Over the altar, every night behold
The great dim broken walls he strove to keep !

There my Lord Clisson did his burial well.
Now, lady, I will go ; God give you rest !

ALICE.

Thank Clisson from me, squire, and farewell !
And now to keep myself from going mad.
Christ ! I have been a many times to church,
And, ever since my mother taught me prayers,
Have used them daily, but to-day I wish
To pray another way ; come face to face,
O Christ, that I may clasp your knees and pray,
I know not what, at any rate come now
From one of many places where you are ;
Either in Heaven amid thick angel wings,
Or sitting on the altar strange with gems,
Or high up in the duskness of the apse ;
Let us go, You and I, a long way off,
To the little damp, dark, Poitevin church ;
While you sit on the coffin in the dark,
Will I lie down, my face on the bare stone
Between your feet, and chatter anything
I have heard long ago, what matters it
So I may keep you there, your solemn face
And long hair even-flowing on each side,
Until you love me well enough to speak,

And give me comfort; yea, till o'er your chin,
And cloven red beard the great tears roll down
In pity for my misery, and I die,
Kissed over by you.

Eh Guesclin! if I were
Like Countess Mountfort now, that kiss'd the knight,
Across the salt sea come to fight for her;
Ah! just to go about with many knights,
Wherever you went, and somehow on one day,
In a thick wood to catch you off your guard,
Let you find, you and your some fifty friends,
Nothing but arrows wheresoe'er you turn'd,
Yea, and red crosses, great spears over them;
And so, between a lane of my true men,
To walk up pale and stern and tall, and with
My arms on my surcoat, and his therewith
And then to make you kneel, O knight Guesclin;
And then — alas! alas! when all is said,
What could I do but let you go again,
Being pitiful woman? I get no revenge,
Whatever happens; and I get no comfort,
I am but weak, and cannot move my feet,
But as men bid me.

Strange I do not die.
Suppose this has not happen'd after all;
I will lean out again and watch for news.

I wonder how long I can still feel thus,
As though I watch'd for news, feel as I did
Just half-an-hour ago, before this news.
How all the street is humming, some men sing,
And some men talk; some look up at the house,
Then lay their heads together and look grave;
Their laughter pains me sorely in the heart,
Their thoughtful talking makes my head turn round,
Yea, some men sing, what is it then they sing?
Eh Launcelot, and love and fate and death;
They ought to sing of him who was as wight
As Launcelot or Wade, and yet avail'd
Just nothing, but to fail and fail and fail,
And so at last to die and leave me here,
Alone and wretched; yea, perhaps they will,
When many years are past, make songs of us;

God help me, though, truly I never thought
That I should make a story in this way,
A story that his eyes can never see.

[*One sings from outside.*]

*Therefore be it believed
Whatsoever he grieved,
When his horse was relieved,
This Launcelot,*

*Beat down on his knee,
Right valiant was he
God's body to see,
Though he saw it not.*

*Right valiant to move,
But for his sad love
The high God above
Stinted his praise.*

*Yet so he was glad
That his son Lord Galahad
That high joyaunce had
All his life-days.*

*Sing we therefore then
Launcelot's praise again,
For he wan crownés ten,
If he wan not twelve.*

*To his death from his birth
He was mickle of worth,
Lay him in the cold earth,
A long grave ye may delve.*

*Omnes homines benedicite !
This last fitte ye may see,
All men pray for me,
Who made this history
Cunning and fairly.*

RAPUNZEL.⁴

THE PRINCE, *being in the wood near the tower, in the evening.*

I COULD not even think
What made me weep that day,
When out of the council-hall
The courtiers pass'd away, —

THE WITCH.

Rapunzel, Rapunzel,
Let down your hair !

RAPUNZEL.

Is it not true that every day
She climbeth up the same strange way,
Her scarlet cloak spread broad and gay
Over my golden hair ?

THE PRINCE.

And left me there alone,
To think on what they said ;
"Thou art a king's own son,
'T is fit that thou shouldst wed."

THE WITCH.

Rapunzel, Rapunzel,
Let down your hair !

RAPUNZEL.

When I undo the knotted mass,
Fathoms below the shadows pass
Over my hair along the grass.
O my golden hair !

THE PRINCE.

I put my armour on,
Thinking on what they said;
"Thou art a king's own son,
'T is fit that thou shouldst wed."

THE WITCH.

Rapunzel, Rapunzel,
Let down your hair!

RAPUNZEL.

See on the marble parapet,
I lean my brow, strive to forget
That fathoms below my hair grows wet
With the dew, my golden hair.

THE PRINCE.

I rode throughout the town,
Men did not bow the head,
Though I was the king's own son;
"He rides to dream," they said.

THE WITCH.

Rapunzel, Rapunzel,
Wind up your hair!

RAPUNZEL.

See on the marble parapet,
The faint red stains with tears are wet;
The long years pass, no help comes yet
To free my golden hair.

THE PRINCE.

For leagues and leagues I rode,
Till hot my armour grew,
Till underneath the leaves
I felt the evening dew.

THE WITCH.

Rapunzel, Rapunzel,
Weep through your hair!

RAPUNZEL.

And yet — but I am growing old,
For want of love my heart is cold,
Years pass, the while I loose and fold
The fathoms of my hair.

THE PRINCE, *in the morning.*

I have heard tales of men, who in the night
Saw paths of stars let down to earth from heaven,
Who follow'd them until they reach'd the light
Wherein they dwell, whose sins are all forgiven;

But who went backward when they saw the gate
Of diamond, nor dared to enter in;
All their life long they were content to wait,
Purging them patiently of every sin.

I must have had a dream of some such thing,
And now am just awaking from that dream;
For even in grey dawn those strange words ring
Through heart and brain, and still I see that gleam.

For in my dream at sunset-time I lay
Beneath these beeches, mail and helmet off,
Right full of joy that I had come away
From court; for I was patient of the scoff

That met me always there from day to day,
From any knave or coward of them all;
I was content to live that wretched way;
For truly till I left the council-hall,

And rode forth arm'd beneath the burning sun,
My gleams of happiness were faint and few,
But then I saw my real life had begun,
And that I should be strong quite well I knew.

For I was riding out to look for love,
Therefore the birds within the thickets sung,
Even in hot noontide; as I pass'd, above
The elms o'ersway'd with longing towards me hung.

Now some few fathoms from the place where I
Lay in the beech-wood, was a tower fair,
The marble corners faint against the sky;
And dreamily I wonder'd what lived there:

Because it seem'd a dwelling for a queen,
No belfry for the swinging of great bells;
No bolt or stone had ever crush'd the green
Shafts, amber and rose walls, no soot that tells

Of the Norse torches burning up the roofs,
On the flower-carven marble could I see;
But rather on all sides I saw the proofs
Of a great loneliness that sicken'd me;

Making me feel a doubt that was not fear,
Whether my whole life long had been a dream,
And I should wake up soon in some place, where
The piled-up arms of the fighting angels gleam;

Not born as yet, but going to be born,
No naked baby as I was at first,
But an armèd knight, whom fire, hate and scorn
Could turn from nothing: my heart almost burst

Beneath the beeches, as I lay a-dreaming,
I tried so hard to read this riddle through,
To catch some golden cord that I saw gleaming
Like gossamer against the autumn blue.

But while I ponder'd these things, from the wood
There came a black-hair'd woman, tall and bold,
Who strode straight up to where the tower stood,
And cried out shrilly words, whereon behold —

THE WITCH, *from the tower.*

Rapunzel, Rapunzel,
Let down your hair!

THE PRINCE.

Ah Christ! it was no dream then, but there stood
(She comes again) a maiden passing fair,
Against the roof, with face turn'd to the wood,
Bearing within her arms waves of her yellow hair.

I read my riddle when I saw her stand,
Poor love! her face quite pale against her hair,
Praying to all the leagues of empty land
To save her from the woe she suffer'd there.

To think! they trod upon her golden hair
In the witches' sabbaths; it was a delight
For these foul things, while she, with thin feet bare,
Stood on the roof upon the winter night,

To plait her dear hair into many plaits,
And then, while God's eye look'd upon the thing,
In the very likenesses of Devil's bats,
Upon the ends of her long hair to swing.

And now she stood above the parapet,
And, spreading out her arms, let her hair flow,
Beneath that veil her smooth white forehead set
Upon the marble, more I do not know;

Because before my eyes a film of gold
Floated, as now it floats. O unknown love,
Would that I could thy yellow stair behold,
If still thou standest the lead roof above!

THE WITCH, *as she passes.*

Is there any who will dare
To climb up the yellow stair,
Glorious Rapunzel's golden hair?

THE PRINCE.

If it would please God make you sing again,
I think that I might very sweetly die,
My soul somehow reach heaven in joyous pain,
My heavy body on the beech-nuts lie.

Now I remember ; what a most strange year,
Most strange and awful, in the beechen wood
I have pass'd now ; I still have a faint fear
It is a kind of dream not understood.

I have seen no one in this wood except
The witch and her ; have heard no human tones,
But when the witches' revelry has crept
Between the very jointing of my bones.

Ah ! I know now ; I could not go away,
But needs must stop to hear her sing that song
She always sings at dawning of the day.
I am not happy here, for I am strong,

And every morning do I whet my sword,
Yet Rapunzel still weeps within the tower,
And still God ties me down to the green sward,
Because I cannot see the gold stair floating lower.

RAPUNZEL sings from the tower.

My mother taught me prayers
To say when I had need ;
I have so many cares,
That I can take no heed
Of many words in them ;
But I remember this :
Christ, bring me to thy bliss.
Mary, maid withouten wem,
Keep me ! I am lone, I wis,
Yet besides I have made this
By myself : *Give me a kiss,*
Dear God, dwelling up in heaven !
Also : Send me a true knight,
Lord Christ, with a steel sword, bright,
Broad, and trenchant ; yea, and seven
Spans from hilt to point, O Lord !
And let the handle of his sword
Be gold on silver, Lord in heaven !
Such a sword as I see gleam
Sometimes, when they let me dream.

Yea, besides, I have made this:
Lord, give Mary a dear kiss,
And let gold Michael, who looked down,
When I was there, on Rouen town
From the spire, bring me that kiss
On a lily! Lord, do this!

These prayers on the dreadful nights,
 When the witches plait my hair,
 And the fearfulest of sights
 On the earth and in the air,
 Will not let me close my eyes,
 I murmur often, mix'd with sighs,
 That my weak heart will not hold
 At some things that I behold.
 Nay, not sighs, but quiet groans,
 That swell out the little bones
 Of my bosom; till a trance
 God sends in middle of that dance,
 And I behold the countenance
 Of Michael, and can feel no more
 The bitter east wind biting sore
 My naked feet; can see no more
 The crayfish on the leaden floor,
 That mock with feeler and grim claw.

Yea, often in that happy trance,
 Beside the blessed countenance
 Of golden Michael, on the spire
 Glowing all crimson in the fire
 Of sunset, I behold a face,
 Which sometime, if God give me grace,
 May kiss me in this very place.

Evening in the Tower.

RAPUNZEL.

It grows half way between the dark and light;
 Love, we have been six hours here alone,
 I fear that she will come before the night,
 And if she finds us thus we are undone.

THE PRINCE.

Nay, draw a little nearer, that your breath
May touch my lips, let my cheek feel your arm ;
Now tell me, did you ever see a death,
Or ever see a man take mortal harm ?

RAPUNZEL.

Once came two knights and fought with swords below,
And while they fought I scarce could look at all,
My head swam so ; after, a moaning low
Drew my eyes down ; I saw against the wall

One knight lean dead, bleeding from head and breast,
Yet seem'd it like a line of poppies red
In the golden twilight, as he took his rest,
In the dusky time he scarcely seemed dead.

But the other, on his face six paces off,
Lay moaning, and the old familiar name
He mutter'd through the grass, seem'd like a scoff
Of some lost soul remembering his past fame.

His helm all dinted lay beside him there,
The visor-bars were twisted towards the face,
The crest, which was a lady very fair,
Wrought wonderfully, was shifted from its place.

The shower'd mail-rings on the speed-walk lay,
Perhaps my eyes were dazzled with the light
That blazed in the west, yet surely on that day
Some crimson thing had changed the grass from
bright

Pure green I love so. But the knight who died
Lay there for days after the other went ;
Until one day I heard a voice that cried,
“ Fair knight, I see Sir Robert we were sent

“ To carry dead or living to the king.”
So the knights came and bore him straight away
On their lance truncheons, such a batter'd thing,
His mother had not known him on that day,

But for his helm-crest, a gold lady fair
Wrought wonderfully.

THE PRINCE.

Ah, they were brothers then,
And often rode together, doubtless where
The swords were thickest, and were loyal men,

Until they fell in these same evil dreams.

RAPUNZEL

Yea, love; but shall we not depart from hence?
The white moon groweth golden fast, and gleams
Between the aspen stems; I fear—and yet a sense

Of fluttering victory comes over me,
That will not let me fear aright; my heart—
Feel how it beats, love, strives to get to thee,
I breathe so fast that my lips needs must part;
Your breath swims round my mouth, but let us go.

THE PRINCE.

I, Sebald, also, pluck from off the staff
The crimson banner, let it lie below,
Above it in the wind let grasses laugh.

Now let us go, love, down the winding stair,
With fingers intertwined: ay, feel my sword!
I wrought it long ago, with golden hair
Flowing about the hilts, because a word,

Sung by a minstrel old, had set me dreaming
Of a sweet bow'd down face with yellow hair.
Betwixt green leaves I used to see it gleaming,
A half smile on the lips, though lines of care

Had sunk the cheeks, and made the great eyes hollow;
What other work in all the world had I,
But through all turns of fate that face to follow?
But wars and business kept me there to die.

O child, I should have slain my brother, too,
My brother, Love, lain moaning in the grass,
Had I not ridden out to look for you,
When I had watch'd the gilded courtiers pass

From the golden hall. But it is strange your name
Is not the same the minstrel sung of yore;
You call'd it Rapunzel, 't is not the name.
See, love, the stems shine through the open door.

Morning in the Woods.

RAPUNZEL.

O love! me and my unknown name you have well won;
The witch's name was Rapunzel: eh! not so sweet?
No! — but is this real grass, love, that I tread upon?
What call they these blue flowers that lean across my
feet?

THE PRINCE.

Dip down your dear face in the dewy grass, O love!
And ever let the sweet slim harebells, tenderly hung,
Kiss both your parted lips; and I will hang above,
And try to sing that song the dreamy harper sung.

He sings.

'Twixt the sunlight and the shade
Float up memories of my maid,
God, remember Guendolen!

Gold or gems she did not wear,
But her yellow rippled hair,
Like a veil, hid Guendolen!

'Twixt the sunlight and the shade,
My rough hands so strangely made,
Folded Golden Guendolen;

Hands used to grip the sword-hilt hard,
Framed her face, while on the sward
Tears fell down from Guendolen.

Guendolen now speaks no word,
 Hands fold round about the sword.
 Now no more of Guendolen.

Only 'twixt the light and shade
 Floating memories of my maid
 Make me pray for Guendolen.

GUENDOLEN.

I kiss thee, new-found name; but I will never go:
 Your hands need never grip the hammer'd sword again,
 But all my golden hair shall ever round you flow,
 Between the light and shade from Golden Guendolen.

Afterwards, in the Palace.

KING SEBALD.

I took my armour off,
 Put on king's robes of gold;
 Over the kirtle green
 The gold fell fold on fold.

THE WITCH, *out of hell.*

Guendolen! Guendolen!
One lock of hair!

GUENDOLEN.

I am so glad, for every day
 He kisses me much the same way
 As in the tower: under the sway
 Of all my golden hair.

KING SEBALD.

We rode throughout the town,
 A gold crown on my head,
 Through all the gold-hung streets,
 "Praise God!" the people said.

THE WITCH.

Guendolen! Guendolen!
Lend me your hair!

GUENDOLEN.

Verily, I seem like one
Who, when day is almost done,
Through a thick wood meets the sun
That blazes in her hair.

KING SEBALD.

Yea, at the palace gates,
"Praise God!" the great knights said,
"For Sebald the high king,
And the lady's golden head."

THE WITCH.

*Woe is me ! Guendolen
Sweeps back her hair.*

GUENDOLEN.

Nothing wretched now, no screams ;
I was unhappy once in dreams,
And even now a harsh voice seems
To hang about my hair.

THE WITCH.

WOE ! THAT ANY MAN COULD DARE
TO CLIMB UP THE YELLOW STAIR,
GLORIOUS GUENDOLEN'S GOLDEN HAIR.

CONCERNING GEFFRAY TESTE NOIRE.⁵⁻⁷

AND if you meet the Canon of Chimay,
As going to Ortaise you well may do,
Greet him from John of Castel Neuf, and say,
All that I tell you, for all this is true.

This Geffray Teste Noire was a Gascon thief,
Who, under shadow of the English name,
Pilled all such towns and countries as were lief
To King Charles and St. Denis; thought it blame

If anything escaped him ; so my lord,
The Duke of Berry, sent Sir John Bonne Lance,
And other knights, good players with the sword,
To check this thief, and give the land a chance.

Therefore we set our bastides round the tower
That Geffray held, the strong thief ! like a king,
High perch'd upon the rock of Ventadour,
Hopelessly strong, by Christ ! it was mid spring,

When first I joined the little army there
With ten good spears ; Auvergne is hot, each day
We sweated armed before the barrier,
Good feats of arms were done there often — eh ?

Your brother was slain there ? I mind me now
A right good man-at-arms, God pardon him !
I think 't was Geffray smote him on the brow
With some spiked axe, and while he totter'd, dim

About the eyes, the spear of Alleyne Roux
Slipped through his camaille and his throat ; well, well !
Alleyne is paid now ; your name Alleyne too ?
Mary ! how strange — but this tale I would tell —

For spite of all our bastides, damned Blackhead
Would ride abroad whene'er he chose to ride,
We could not stop him ; many a burgher bled
Dear gold all round his girdle ; far and wide

The villaynes dwelt in utter misery
'Twixt us and thief Sir Geffray ; hauled this way
By Sir Bonne Lance at one time ; he gone by,
Down comes this Teste Noire on another day.

And therefore they dig up the stone, grind corn,
Hew wood, draw water, yea, they lived, in short,
As I said just now, utterly forlorn,
Till this our knave and blackhead was out-fought.

So Bonne Lance fretted, thinking of some trap
Day after day, till on a time he said :
“ John of Newcastle, if we have good hap,
We catch our thief in two days.” “ How ? ” I said.

"Why, Sir, to-day he rideth out again,
Hoping to take well certain sumpter mules
From Carcassonne, going with little train,
Because, forsooth, he thinketh us mere fools ;

"But if we set an ambush in some wood,
He is but dead ; so, Sir, take thirty spears
To Verville forest, if it seem you good."
Then felt I like the horse in Job, who hears

The dancing trumpet sound, and we went forth ;
And my red lion on the spear-head flapped,
As faster than the cool wind we rode North,
Towards the wood of Verville ; thus it happed.

We rode a soft pace on that day while spies
Got news about Sir Geffray ; the red wine
Under the road-side bush was clear ; the flies,
The dragon-flies I mind me most, did shine

In brighter arms than ever I put on ;
So — "Geffray," said our spies, "would pass that way
Next day at sundown ;" then he must be won ;
And so we enter'd Verville wood next day,

In the afternoon ; through it the highway runs,
'Twixt copses of green hazel, very thick,
And underneath, with glimmering of suns,
The primroses are happy ; the dews lick

The soft green moss. "Put cloths about your arms,
Lest they should glitter ; surely they will go
In a long thin line, watchful for alarms,
With all their carriages of booty ; so, —

"Lay down my pennon in the grass — Lord God !
What have we lying here ? will they be cold,
I wonder, being so bare, above the sod,
Instead of under ? This was a knight too, fold

"Lying on fold of ancient rusted mail ;
No plate at all, gold rowels to the spurs,
And see the quiet gleam of turquoise pale
Along the ceinture ; but the long time blurs

“Even the tinder of his coat to nought,
Except these scraps of leather; see how white
The skull is, loose within the coif! He fought
A good fight, maybe, ere he was slain quite.

“No armour on the legs too; strange in faith —
A little skeleton for a knight though — ah!
This one is bigger, truly without scathe
His enemies escaped not — ribs driven out far —

“That must have reach’d the heart, I doubt — how now,
What say you, Aldovrand — a woman? why?”
“Under the coif a gold wreath on the brow,
Yea, see the hair not gone to powder, lie,

“Golden, no doubt, once — yea, and very small —
This for a knight; but for a dame, my lord,
These loose-hung bones seem shapely still, and tall, —
Didst ever see a woman’s bones, my lord?”

Often, God help me! I remember when
I was a simple boy, fifteen years old,
The Jacquerie froze up the blood of men
With their fell deeds, not fit now to be told:

God help again! we enter’d Beauvais town,
Slaying them fast, whereto I help’d, mere boy
As I was then; we gentles cut them down,
These burners and defilers, with great joy.

Reason for that, too, in the great church there
These fiends had lit a fire, that soon went out,
The church at Beauvais being so great and fair —
My father, who was by me, gave a shout

Between a beast’s howl and a woman’s scream,
Then, panting, chuckled to me: “John, look! look!
Count the dames’ skeletons!” From some bad dream
Like a man just awaked, my father shook;

And I, being faint with smelling the burnt bones,
And very hot with fighting down the street,
And sick of such a life, fell down, with groans
My head went weakly nodding to my feet. —

— An arrow had gone through her tender throat,
And her right wrist was broken ; then I saw
The reason why she had on that war-coat,
Their story came out clear without a flaw ;

For when he knew that they were being waylaid,
He threw it over her, yea, hood and all ;
Whereby he was much hack'd, while they were stay'd
By those their murderers ; many an one did fall

Beneath his arm, no doubt, so that he clear'd
Their circle, bore his death-wound out of it ;
But as they rode, some archer least afar'd
Drew a strong bow, and thereby she was hit.

Still as he rode he knew not she was dead,
Thought her but fainted from her broken wrist,
He bound with his great leathern belt — she bled ?
Who knows ! he bled too, neither was there miss'd

The beating of her heart, his heart beat well
For both of them, till here, within this wood,
He died scarce sorry ; easy this to tell ;
After these years the flowers forget their blood. —

How could it be ? never before that day,
However much a soldier I might be,
Could I look on a skeleton and say
I care not for it, shudder not — now see,

Over those bones I sat and pored for hours,
And thought, and dream'd, and still I scarce could see
The small white bones that lay upon the flowers,
But evermore I saw the lady ; she

With her dear gentle walking leading in,
By a chain of silver twined about her wrists,
Her loving knight, mounted and arm'd to win
Great honour for her, fighting in the lists.

O most pale face, that brings such joy and sorrow
Into men's hearts — yea, too, so piercing sharp
That joy is, that it marcheth nigh to sorrow
For ever — like an overwinded harp.

Your face must hurt me always: pray you now,
Doth it not hurt you too? seemeth some pain
To hold you always, pain to hold your brow
So smooth, unwrinkled ever; yea again,

Your long eyes where the lids seem like to drop,
Would you not, lady, were they shut fast, feel
Far merrier! there so high they will not stop,
They are most sly to glide forth and to steal

*Into my heart; I kiss their soft lids there,
And in green gardens scarce can stop my lips
From wandering on your face, but that your hair
Falls down and tangles me, back my face slips.*

Or say your mouth — I saw you drink red wine
Once at a feast; how slowly it sank in,
As though you fear'd that some wild fate might twine
Within that cup, and slay you for a sin.

And when you talk your lips do arch and move
In such wise that a language new I know
Besides their sound; they quiver, too, with love
When you are standing silent; know this, too,

I saw you kissing once, like a curved sword
That bites with all its edge, did your lips lie,
Curled gently, slowly, long time could afford
For caught-up breathings; like a dying sigh

They gather'd up their lines and went away,
And still kept twitching with a sort of smile,
As likely to be weeping presently, —
Your hands too — how I watch'd them all the while!

“Cry out St. Peter now,” quoth Aldovrand;
I cried “St. Peter,” broke out from the wood
With all my spears; we met them hand to hand,
And shortly slew them; natheless, by the rood,

We caught not Blackhead then, or any day;
Months after that he died at last in bed,
From a wound pick'd up at a barrier-fray;
That same year's end a steel bolt in the head,

And much bad living kill'd Teste Noire at last;
 John Froissart knoweth he is dead by now,
 No doubt, but knoweth not this tale just past;
 Perchance then you can tell him what I show.

In my new castle, down beside the Eure,
 There is a little chapel of squared stone,
 Painted inside and out; in green nook pure
 There did I lay them, every wearied bone;

And over it they lay, with stone-white hands
 Clasped fast together, hair made bright with gold;
 This Jaques Picard, known through many lands,
 Wrought cunningly; he 's dead now — I am old.

OLD LOVE.

"You must be very old, Sir Giles,"
 I said; he said: "Yea, very old:"
 Whereat the mournfullest of smiles
 Creased his dry skin with many a fold.

"They hammer'd out my basnet point
 Into a round salade," he said,
 "The basnet being quite out of joint,
 Natheless the salade rasps my head."

He gazed at the great fire a while:
 "And you are getting old, Sir John;"
 (He said this with that cunning smile
 That was most sad;) "we both wear on,

"Knights come to court and look at me,
 With eyebrows up, except my lord,
 And my dear lady, none I see
 That know the ways of my old sword."

(My lady! at that word no pang
 Stopp'd all my blood.) "But tell me, John,
 Is it quite true that pagans hang
 So thick about the east, that on

"The eastern sea no Venice flag
Can fly unpaid for?" "True," I said,
"And in such way the miscreants drag
Christ's cross upon the ground, I dread

"That Constantine must fall this year."
Within my heart; "These things are small;
This is not small, that things outwear
I thought were made for ever, yea, all,

"All things go soon or late;" I said —
I saw the duke in court next day;
Just as before, his grand great head
Above his gold robes dreaming lay,

Only his face was paler; there
I saw his duchess sit by him;
And she — she was changed more; her hair
Before my eyes that used to swim,

And make me dizzy with great bliss
Once, when I used to watch her sit —
Her hair is bright still, yet it is
As though some dust were thrown on it.

Her eyes are shallower, as though
Some grey glass were behind; her brow
And cheeks the straining bones show through
Are not so good for kissing now.

Her lips are drier now she is
A great duke's wife these many years,
They will not shudder with a kiss
As once they did, being moist with tears.

Also her hands have lost that way
Of clinging that they used to have;
They look'd quite easy, as they lay
Upon the silken cushions brave

With broidery of the apples green
My Lord Duke bears upon his shield.

Her face, alas! that I have seen
Look fresher than an April field,

This is all gone now; gone also
Her tender walking; when she walks
She is most queenly I well know,
And she is fair still: — as the stalks

Of faded summer-lilies are,
So is she grown now unto me
This spring-time, when the flowers star
The meadows, birds sing wonderfully.

I warrant once she used to cling
About his neck, and kiss'd him so,
And then his coming step would ring
Joy-bells for her, — some time ago.

Ah! sometimes like an idle dream
That hinders true life overmuch,
Sometimes like a lost heaven, these seem. —
This love is not so hard to smutch.

SHAMEFUL DEATH.

THERE were four of us about that bed;
The mass-priest knelt at the side,
I and his mother stood at the head,
Over his feet lay the bride;
We were quite sure that he was dead,
Though his eyes were open wide.

He did not die in the night,
He did not die in the day,
But in the morning twilight
His spirit pass'd away,
When neither sun nor moon was bright,
And the trees were merely grey.

He was not slain with the sword,
Knight's axe, or the knightly spear,
Yet spoke he never a word
After he came in here;
I cut away the cord
From the neck of my brother dear.

He did not strike one blow,
For the recreants came behind,
In a place where the hornbeams grow,
A path right hard to find,
For the hornbeam boughs swing so,
That the twilight makes it blind.

They lighted a great torch then,
When his arms were pinion'd fast,
Sir John the knight of the Fen,
Sir Guy of the Dolorous Blast,
With knights threescore and ten,
Hung brave Lord Hugh at last.

I am threescore and ten,
And my hair is all turn'd grey,
But I met Sir John of the Fen
Long ago on a summer day,
And am glad to think of the moment when
I took his life away.

I am threescore and ten,
And my strength is mostly pass'd,
But long ago I and my men,
When the sky was overcast,
And the smoke roll'd over the reeds of the fen,
Slew Guy of the Dolorous Blast.

And now, knights all of you,
I pray you pray for Sir Hugh,
A good knight and a true,
And for Alice, his wife, pray too.

THE EVE OF CRECY.⁸

GOLD on her head, and gold on her feet,
And gold where the hems of her kirtle meet,
And a golden girdle round my sweet;—

Ah! qu'elle est belle La Marguerite.

Margaret's maids are fair to see,
Freshly dress'd and pleasantly;
Margaret's hair falls down to her knee;—

Ah! qu'elle est belle La Marguerite.

If I were rich I would kiss her feet,
I would kiss the place where the gold hems meet,
And the golden girdle round my sweet:—

Ah! qu'elle est belle La Marguerite.

Ah me! I have never touch'd her hand,
When the arrière-ban goes through the land,
Six basnets under my pennon stand;—

Ah! qu'elle est belle La Marguerite.

And many an one grins under his hood:
"Sir Lambert de Bois, with all his men good,
Has neither food nor firewood;"—

Ah! qu'elle est belle La Marguerite.

If I were rich I would kiss her feet,
And the golden girdle of my sweet,
And thereabouts where the gold hems meet;

Ah! qu'elle est belle La Marguerite.

Yet even now it is good to think,
While my few poor varlets grumble and drink
In my desolate hall, where the fires sink,—

Ah! qu'elle est belle La Marguerite.

Of Margaret sitting glorious there,
In glory of gold and glory of hair,
And glory of glorious face most fair;—

Ah! qu'elle est belle La Marguerite.

Likewise to-night I make good cheer,
 Because this battle draweth near :
 For what have I to lose or fear ? —
Ah ! qu'elle est belle La Marguerite.

For, look you, my horse is good to prance
 A right fair measure in this war-dance,
 Before the eyes of Philip of France ; —
Ah ! qu'elle est belle La Marguerite.

And sometime it may hap, perdie,
 While my new towers stand up three and three,
 And my hall gets painted fair to see, —
Ah ! qu'elle est belle La Marguerite —

That folks may say : “ Times change, by the rood,
 For Lambert, banneret of the wood,
 Has heaps of food and firewood ; —
Ah ! qu'elle est belle La Marguerite ; —

“ And wonderful eyes, too, under the hood
 Of a damsel of right noble blood : ”
 St. Ives, for Lambert of the Wood ! —
Ah ! qu'elle est belle La Marguerite.

THE GILLIFLOWER OF GOLD.

A GOLDEN gilliflower to-day
 I wore upon my helm alway,
 And won the prize of this tourney.
Hah ! hah ! la belle jaune giroflée.

However well Sir Giles might sit,
 His sun was weak to wither it,
 Lord Miles's blood was dew on it :
Hah ! hah ! la belle jaune giroflée.

Although my spear in splinters flew,
 From John's steel-coat, my eye was true ;
 I wheel'd about, and cried for you,
Hah ! hah ! la belle jaune giroflée.

Yea, do not doubt my heart was good,
Though my sword flew like rotten wood,
To shout, although I scarcely stood,
Hah ! hah ! la belle jaune giroflée.

My hand was steady too, to take
My axe from round my neck, and break
John's steel-coat up for my love's sake.
Hah ! hah ! la belle jaune giroflée.

When I stood in my tent again,
Arming afresh, I felt a pain
Take hold of me, I was so fain,
Hah ! hah ! la belle jaune giroflée.

To hear: "*Honneur aux fils des preux !*"
Right in my ears again, and shew
The gilliflower blossom'd new.
Hah ! hah ! la belle jaune giroflée.

The Sieur Guillaume against me came,
His tabard bore three points of flame
From a red heart: with little blame,—
Hah ! hah ! la belle jaune giroflée.

Our tough spears crackled up like straw ;
He was the first to turn and draw
His sword, that had nor speck nor flaw,—
Hah ! hah ! la belle jaune giroflée.

But I felt weaker than a maid,
And my brain, dizzyed and afraid,
Within my helm a fierce tune play'd,—
Hah ! hah ! la belle jaune giroflée.

Until I thought of your dear head,
Bow'd to the gilliflower bed,
The yellow flowers stain'd with red ;—
Hah ! hah ! la belle jaune giroflée.

Crash ! how the swords met, "*giroflée !*"
The fierce tune in my helm would play,
"*La belle ! la belle ! jaune giroflée !*"
Hah ! hah ! la belle jaune giroflée.

Once more the great swords met again,
 "La belle! la belle!" but who fell then?
 Le Sieur Guillaume, who struck down ten; —
Hah! hah! la belle jaune giroflée.

And as with mazed and unarm'd face,
 Toward my own crown and the Queen's place,
 They led me at a gentle pace.
Hah! hah! la belle jaune giroflée.

I almost saw your quiet head
 Bow'd o'er the gilliflower bed,
 The yellow flowers stain'd with red. —
Hah! hah! la belle jaune giroflée.

THE JUDGMENT OF GOD.

"SWERVE to the left, son Roger," he said,
 "When you catch his eyes through the helmet-slit,
 Swerve to the left, then out at his head,
 And the Lord God give you joy of it!"

The blue owls on my father's hood
 Were a little dimm'd as I turn'd away;
 This giving up of blood for blood
 Will finish here somehow to-day.

So when I walk'd out from the tent,
 Their howling almost blinded me;
 Yet for all that I was not bent
 By any shame. Hard by, the sea

Made a noise like the aspens where
 We did that wrong, but now the place
 Is very pleasant, and the air
 Blows cool on any passer's face.

And all the wrong is gather'd now
 Into the circle of these lists —
 Yea, howl out, butchers! tell me how
 His hands were cut off at the wrists;

And how Lord Roger bore his face
A league above his spear-point, high
Above the owls, to that strong place
Among the waters — yea, yea, cry :

“What a brave champion we have got !
Sir Oliver, the flower of all
The Hainault knights.” The day being hot,
He sat beneath a broad white pall,

White linen over all his steel ;
What a good knight he look'd ! his sword
Laid thwart his knees ; he liked to feel
Its steadfast edge clear as his word.

And he look'd solemn : how his love
Smiled whitely on him, sick with fear !
How all the ladies up above
Twisted their pretty hands ; so near

The fighting was — Ellayne ! Ellayne !
They cannot love like you can, who
Would burn your hands off, if that pain
Could win a kiss — am I not true

To you for ever ? therefore I
Do not fear death or anything ;
If I should limp home wounded, why,
While I lay sick you would but sing,

And soothe me into quiet sleep.
If they spat on the recreant knight,
Threw stones at him, and cursed him deep,
Why then — what then ; your hand would light

So gently on his drawn-up face,
And you would kiss him, and in soft
Cool scented clothes would lap him, pace
The quiet room and weep oft, — oft

Would turn and smile, and brush his cheek
With your sweet chin and mouth ; and in
The order'd garden you would seek
The biggest roses — any sin.

And these say: "No more now my knight,
Or God's knight any longer" — you,
Being than they so much more white,
So much more pure and good and true,

Will cling to me for ever — there,
Is not that wrong turn'd right at last
Through all these years, and I wash'd clean?
Say, yea, Ellayne; the time is past,

Since on that Christmas-day last year
Up to your feet the fire crept,
And the smoke through the brown leaves sere
Blinded your dear eyes that you wept;

Was it not I that caught you then,
And kiss'd you on the saddle-bow?
Did not the blue owl mark the men
Whose spears stood like the corn a-row?

This Oliver is a right good knight,
And must needs beat me, as I fear,
Unless I catch him in the fight,
My father's crafty way — John, here!

Bring up the men from the south gate,
To help me if I fall or win,
For even if I beat, their hate
Will grow to more than this mere grin.

THE HAYSTACK IN THE FLOODS.

HAD she come all the way for this,
To part at last without a kiss?
Yea, had she borne the dirt and rain
That her own eyes might see him slain
Beside the haystack in the floods?

Along the dripping leafless woods,
The stirrup touching either shoe,

She rode astride as troopers do;
With kirtle kilted to her knee,
To which the mud splash'd wretchedly;
And the wet dripp'd from every tree
Upon her head and heavy hair,
And on her eyelids broad and fair;
The tears and rain ran down her face.

By fits and starts they rode apace,
And very often was his place
Far off from her; he had to ride
Ahead, to see what might betide
When the roads cross'd; and sometimes, when
There rose a murmuring from his men,
Had to turn back with promises;
Ah me! she had but little ease;
And often for pure doubt and dread
She sobb'd, made giddy in the head
By the swift riding; while, for cold,
Her slender fingers scarce could hold
The wet reins; yea, and scarcely, too,
She felt the foot within her shoe
Against the stirrup: all for this,
To part at last without a kiss
Beside the haystack in the floods.

For when they near'd that old soak'd hay,
They saw across the only way
That Judas, Godmar, and the three
Red running lions dismally
Grinn'd from his pennon, under which
In one straight line along the ditch,
They counted thirty heads.

So then,
While Robert turn'd round to his men,
She saw at once the wretched end,
And, stooping down, tried hard to rend
Her coif the wrong way from her head,
And hid her eyes; while Robert said:
"Nay, love, 't is scarcely two to one,
At Poitiers where we made them run
So fast — why, sweet my love, good cheer,

The Gascon frontier is so near,
Nought after this."

But, "O," she said,
"My God! my God! I have to tread
The long way back without you; then
The court at Paris; those six men;
The gratings of the Chatelet;
The swift Seine on some rainy day
Like this, and people standing by,
And laughing, while my weak hands try
To recollect how strong men swim.
All this, or else a life with him,
For which I should be damned at last,
Would God that this next hour were past!"

He answer'd not, but cried his cry,
"St. George for Marny!" cheerily;
And laid his hand upon her rein.
Alas! no man of all his train
Gave back that cheery cry again;
And, while for rage his thumb beat fast
Upon his sword-hilt, some one cast
About his neck a kerchief long,
And bound him.

Then they went along
To Godmar; who said: "Now, Jehane,
Your lover's life is on the wane
So fast, that, if this very hour
You yield not as my paramour,
He will not see the rain leave off —
Nay, keep your tongue from gibe and scoff,
Sir Robert, or I slay you now."

She laid her hand upon her brow,
Then gazed upon the palm, as though
She thought her forehead bled, and "No,"
She said, and turn'd her head away,
As there were nothing else to say,
And everything were settled: red
Grew Godmar's face from chin to head:
"Jehane, on yonder hill there stands

My castle, guarding well my lands :
What hinders me from taking you,
And doing that I list to do
To your fair wilful body, while
Your knight lies dead ?”

A wicked smile
Wrinkled her face, her lips grew thin,
A long way out she thrust her chin :
“ You know that I should strangle you
While you were sleeping ; or bite through
Your throat, by God’s help — ah ! ” she said,
“ Lord Jesus, pity your poor maid !
For in such wise they hem me in,
I cannot choose but sin and sin,
Whatever happens : yet I think
They could not make me eat or drink,
And so should I just reach my rest.”
“ Nay, if you do not my behest,
O Jehane ! though I love you well,”
Said Godmar, “ would I fail to tell
All that I know.” “ Foul lies,” she said.
“ Eh ! lies, my Jehane ? by God’s head,
At Paris folks would deem them true !
Do you know, Jehane, they cry for you,
‘ Jehane the brown ! Jehane the brown !
Give us Jehane to burn or drown ! ’ —
Eh — gag me, Robert ! — sweet my friend,
This were indeed a piteous end
For those long fingers, and long feet,
And long neck, and smooth shoulders sweet ;
An end that few men would forget
That saw it — So, an hour yet :
Consider, Jehane, which to take
Of life or death ! ”

So, scarce awake,
Dismounting, did she leave that place,
And totter some yards : with her face
Turn’d upward to the sky she lay,
Her head on a wet heap of hay,
And fell asleep : and while she slept,
And did not dream, the minutes crept

Round to the twelve again ; but she,
Being waked at last, sigh'd quietly,
And strangely childlike came, and said :
"I will not." Straightway Godmar's head,
As though it hung on strong wires turn'd
Most sharply round, and his face burn'd.

For Robert — both his eyes were dry,
He could not weep, but gloomily
He seem'd to watch the rain ; yea, too,
His lips were firm ; he tried once more
To touch her lips ; she reach'd out, sore
And vain desire so tortured them,
The poor grey lips, and now the hem
Of his sleeve brush'd them.

With a start
Up Godmar rose, thrust them apart ;
From Robert's throat he loosed the bands
Of silk and mail ; with empty hands
Held out, she stood and gazed, and saw,
The long bright blade without a flaw
Glide out from Godmar's sheath, his hand
In Robert's hair ; she saw him bend
Back Robert's head ; she saw him send
The thin steel down ; the blow told well,
Right backward the knight Robert fell,
And moan'd as dogs do, being half dead,
Unwitting, as I deem : so then
Godmar turn'd grinning to his men,
Who ran, some five or six, and beat
His head to pieces at their feet.

Then Godmar turn'd again and said :
"So Jehane, the first fitte is read !
Take note, my lady, that your way
Lies backward to the Chatelet !"
She shook her head and gazed awhile
At her cold hands with a rueful smile,
As though this thing had made her mad.

This was the parting that they had
Beside the haystack in the floods.

RIDING TOGETHER.⁹

For many, many days together
The wind blew steady from the East;
For many days hot grew the weather,
About the time of our Lady's Feast.

For many days we rode together,
Yet met we neither friend nor foe;
Hotter and clearer grew the weather,
Steadily did the East wind blow.

We saw the trees in the hot, bright weather,
Clear-cut, with shadows very black
As freely we rode on together
With helms unlaced and bridles slack.

And often as we rode together,
We, looking down the green-bank'd stream,
Saw flowers in the sunny weather,
And saw the bubble-making bream.

And in the night lay down together,
And hung above our heads the rood,
Or watch'd night-long in the dewy weather,
The while the moon did watch the wood.

Our spears stood bright and thick together,
Straight out the banners stream'd behind,
As we gallop'd on in the sunny weather,
With faces turn'd towards the wind.

Down sank our threescore spears together,
As thick we saw the pagans ride;
His eager face in the clear fresh weather,
Shone out that last time by my side.

Up the sweep of the bridge we dash'd together,
It rock'd to the crash of the meeting spears,
Down rain'd the buds of the dear spring weather,
The elm-tree flowers fell like tears.

There, as we roll'd and writhed together,
I threw my arms above my head,
For close by my side, in the lovely weather,
I saw him reel and fall back dead.

I and the slayer met together,
He waited the death-stroke there in his place,
With thoughts of death, in the lovely weather,
Gapingly mazed at my madden'd face.

Madly I fought as we fought together ;
In vain : the little Christian band
The pagans drown'd, as in stormy weather,
The river drowns low-lying land.

They bound my blood-stain'd hands together,
They bound his corpse to nod by my side:
Then on we rode, in the bright March weather,
With clash of cymbals did we ride.

We ride no more, no more together ;
My prison-bars are thick and strong,
I take no heed of any weather,
The sweet Saints grant I live not long.

WINTER WEATHER.

We rode together
In the winter weather
To the broad mead under the hill ;
Though the skies did shiver
With the cold, the river
Ran, and was never still.

No cloud did darken
The night ; we did hearken
The hound's bark far away.
It was solemn midnight
In that dread, dread night,
In the years that have pass'd for aye.

Two rode beside me,
My banner did hide me,
As it droop'd adown from my lance;
With its deep blue trapping,
The mail over-lapping,
My gallant horse did prance.

So ever together
In the sparkling weather
Moved my banner and lance;
And its laurel trapping,
The steel over-lapping,
The stars saw quiver and dance.

We met together
In the winter weather
By the town-walls under the hill;
His mail-rings came clinking,
They broke on my thinking,
For the night was hush'd and still.

Two rode beside him,
His banner did hide him,
As it droop'd down strait from his lance;
With its blood-red trapping,
The mail overlapping,
His mighty horse did prance.

And ever together
In the solemn weather
Moved his banner and lance;
And the holly trapping,
The steel overlapping,
Did shimmer and shiver, and dance.

Back reined the squires
Till they saw the spires
Over the city wall;
Ten fathoms between us,
No dames could have seen us
Tilt, from the city wall.

There we sat upright
Till the full midnight
Should be told from the city chimes :
Sharp from the towers
Leapt forth the showers
Of the many clanging rhymes.

'T was the midnight hour,
Deep from the tower
Boom'd the following bell ;
Down go our lances,
Shout for the lances !
The last toll was his knell.

There he lay, dying ;
He had, for his lying,
A spear in his traitorous mouth ;
A false tale made he
Of my true, true lady ;
But the spear went through his mouth.

In the winter weather
We rode back together
From the broad mead under the hill ;
And the cock sung his warning
As it grew toward morning,
But the far-off hound was still.

Black grew his tower
As we rode down lower,
Black from the barren hill ;
And our horses strode
Up the winding road
To the gateway dim and still.

At the gate of his tower,
In the quiet hour,
We laid his body there ;
But his helmet broken,
We took as a token ;
Shout for my lady fair !

We rode back together
 In the winter weather
 From the broad mead under the hill;
 No cloud did darken
 The night; we did hearken
 How the hound bay'd from the hill.

THE BLUE CLOSET.¹⁰

THE DAMOZELS.

LADY Alice, lady Louise,
 Between the wash of the tumbling seas
 We are ready to sing, if so ye please;
 So lay your long hands on the keys;
 Sing, "*Laudate pueri.*"

*And ever the great bell overhead
 Boom'd in the wind a knell for the dead,
 Though no one toll'd it, a knell for the dead.*

LADY LOUISE.

Sister, let the measure swell
 Not too loud; for you sing not well
 If you drown the faint boom of the bell;
 He is weary, so am I.

*And ever the chevron overhead
 Flapp'd on the banner of the dead;
 (Was he asleep, or was he dead?)*

LADY ALICE.

Alice the Queen, and Louise the Queen,
 Two damozels wearing purple and green,
 Four lone ladies dwelling here
 From day to day and year to year;
 And there is none to let us go;
 To break the locks of the doors below,
 Or shovel away the heaped-up snow;

And when we die no man will know
That we are dead ; but they give us leave,
Once every year on Christmas-eve,
To sing in the Closet Blue one song ;
And we should be so long, so long,
If we dared, in singing ; for dream on dream,
They float on in a happy stream ;
Float from the gold strings, float from the keys,
Float from the open'd lips of Louise ;
But, alas ! the sea-salt oozes through
The chinks of the tiles of the Closet Blue ;

*And ever the great bell overhead
Booms in the wind a knell for the dead,
The wind plays on it a knell for the dead.*

[*They sing all together.*]

How long ago was it, how long ago,
He came to this tower with hands full of snow ?

"Kneel down, O love Louise, kneel down," he said,
And sprinkled the dusty snow over my head.

He watch'd the snow melting, it ran through my hair.
Ran over my shoulders, white shoulders and bare.

"I cannot weep for thee, poor love Louise,
For my tears are all hidden deep under the seas ;

"In a gold and blue casket she keeps all my tears,
But my eyes are no longer blue, as in old years ;

"Yea, they grow grey with time, grow small and dry,
I am so feeble now, would I might die."

*And in truth the great bell overhead
Left off his pealing for the dead,
Perchance, because the wind was dead.*

Will he come back again, or is he dead ?
O ! is he sleeping, my scarf round his head ?

Or did they strangle him as he lay there,
With the long scarlet scarf I used to wear ?

Only I pray thee, Lord, let him come here !
Both his soul and his body to me are most dear.

Dear Lord, that loves me, I wait to receive
Either body or spirit this wild Christmas-eve.

*Through the floor shot up a lily red,
With a patch of earth from the land of the dead,
For he was strong in the land of the dead.*

What matter that his cheeks were pale,
His kind kiss'd lips all grey ?
"O, love Louise, have you waited long ?"
"O, my lord Arthur, yea."

What if his hair that brush'd her cheek
Was stiff with frozen rime ?
His eyes were grown quite blue again,
As in the happy time.

"O, love Louise, this is the key
Of the happy golden land !
O, sisters, cross the bridge with me,
My eyes are full of sand.
What matter that I cannot see,
If ye take me by the hand ?"

*And ever the great bell overhead,
And the tumbling seas mourn'd for the dead ;
For their song ceased, and they were dead.*

PRAISE OF MY LADY.¹⁰

My lady seems of ivory,
Forehead, straight nose, and cheeks that be
Hollow'd a little mournfully.
Beata mea Domina !

Her forehead, overshadow'd much
By bows of hair, has a wave such
As God was good to make for me.

Beata mea Domina!

Not greatly long my lady's hair,
Nor yet with yellow colour fair,
But thick and crispèd wonderfully:

Beata mea Domina!

Heavy to make the pale face sad,
And dark, but dead as though it had
Been forged by God most wonderfully

— *Beata mea Domina!* —

Of some strange metal, thread by thread,
To stand out from my lady's head,
Not moving much to tangle me.

Beata mea Domina!

Beneath her brows the lids fall slow,
The lashes a clear shadow throw
Where I would wish my lips to be.

Beata mea Domina!

Her great eyes, standing far apart,
Draw up some memory from her heart,
And gaze out very mournfully;

— *Beata mea Domina!* —

So beautiful and kind they are,
But most times looking out afar,
Waiting for something, not for me.

Beata mea Domina!

I wonder if the lashes long
Are those that do her bright eyes wrong,
For always half tears seem to be

— *Beata mea Domina!* —

Lurking below the underlid,
Darkening the place where they lie hid —
If they should rise and flow for me!

Beata mea Domina!

Her full lips being made to kiss,
Curl'd up and pensive each one is;
This makes me faint to stand and see.

Beata mea Domina !

Her lips are not contented now,
Because the hours pass so slow
Towards a sweet time : (pray for me),

— *Beata mea Domina !* —

Nay, hold thy peace ! for who can tell ;
But this at least I know full well,
Her lips are parted longingly,

— *Beata mea Domina !* —

So passionate and swift to move,
To pluck at any flying love,
That I grow faint to stand and see.

Beata mea Domina !

Yea ! there beneath them is her chin,
So fine and round, it were a sin
To feel no weaker when I see

— *Beata mea Domina !* —

God's dealings ; for with so much care
And troublous, faint lines wrought in there,
He finishes her face for me.

Beata mea Domina !

Of her long neck what shall I say ?
What things about her body's sway,
Like a knight's pennon or slim tree

— *Beata mea Domina !* —

Set gently waving in the wind ;
Or her long hands that I may find
On some day sweet to move o'er me ?

Beata mea Domina !

God pity me though, if I miss'd
The telling, how along her wrist
The veins creep, dying languidly

— *Beata mea Domina !* —

Inside her tender palm and thin.
 Now give me pardon, dear, wherein
 My voice is weak and vexes thee.
Beata mea Domina !

All men that see her any time,
 I charge you straightly in this rhyme,
 What, and wherever you may be,
 — *Beata mea Domina !* —

To kneel before her; as for me,
 I choke and grow quite faint to see
 My lady moving graciously.
Beata mea Domina !

SUMMER DAWN.¹⁰

PRAY but one prayer for me 'twixt thy closed lips,
 Think but one thought of me up in the stars.
 The summer night waneth, the morning light slips,
 Faint and grey 'twixt the leaves of the aspen, betwixt
 the cloud-bars,
 That are patiently waiting there for the dawn :
 Patient and colourless, though Heaven's gold
 Waits to float through them along with the sun.
 Far out in the meadows, above the young corn,
 The heavy elms wait, and restless and cold
 The uneasy wind rises ; the roses are dun ;
 Through the long twilight they pray for the dawn,
 Round the lone house in the midst of the corn.
 Speak but one word to me over the corn,
 Over the tender, bow'd locks of the corn.

THE LIFE AND DEATH OF JASON.¹¹
(SELECTION OF SONGS.)

THE LIFE AND DEATH OF JASON.

A GARDEN BY THE SEA.¹²

I know a little garden-close,
Set thick with lily and red rose,
Where I would wander if I might
From dewy morn to dewy night,
And have one with me wandering.

And though within it no birds sing,
And though no pillared house is there,
And though the apple-boughs are bare
Of fruit and blossom, would to God
Her feet upon the green grass trod,
And I beheld them as before.

There comes a murmur from the shore,
And in the close two fair streams are,
Drawn from the purple hills afar,
Drawn down unto the restless sea:
Dark hills whose heath-bloom feeds no bee,
Dark shore no ship has ever seen,
Tormented by the billows green
Whose murmur comes unceasingly
Unto the place for which I cry.

For which I cry both day and night,
For which I let slip all delight,
Whereby I grow both deaf and blind,
Careless to win, unskilled to find,
And quick to lose what all men seek.

Yet tottering as I am and weak,
Still have I left a little breath
To seek within the jaws of death

An entrance to that happy place,
To seek the unforgotten face,
Once seen, once kissed, once reft from me
Anigh the murmuring of the sea.

“O SURELY, NOW THE FISHERMAN.”¹³

O SURELY, now the fisherman
Draws homeward through the water wan
Across the bay we know so well,
And in the sheltered chalky dell
The shepherd stirs; and now afield
They drive the team with white wand peeled,
Muttering across the barley-bread
At daily toil and dreary-head.

And midst them all, perchance, my love
Is waking, and doth gently move
And stretch her soft arms out to me,
Forgetting thousand leagues of sea;
And now her body I behold,
Unhidden but by hair of gold,
And now the silver water kiss,
The crown of all delight and bliss.
And now I see her bind her hair
And do upon her raiment fair,
And now before the altar stand,
With incense in her outstretched hand,
To supplicate the Gods for me;
Ah, one day landing from the sea,
Amid the maidens shall I hear
Her voice in praise, and see her near,
Holding the gold-wrapt laurel crown,
Midst of the shouting, wondering town!

“ALAS! FOR SATURN’S DAYS OF GOLD.”¹⁴

ALAS! for Saturn’s days of gold,
Before the mountain men were bold
To dig up iron from the earth
Wherewith to slaughter health and mirth,

And bury hope far underground.
When all men needed did abound
In every land; nor must they toil,
Nor wear their lives in strife to foil
Each other's hands, for all was good,
And no man knew the sight of blood.

With all the world man had no strife,
No element against his life
Was sworn and bitter; on the sea,
Dry-shod, could all walk easily;
No fire there was but what made day,
Or hidden in the mountains grey;
No pestilence, no lightning flash,
No over-mastering wind, to dash
The roof upon some trembling head.

Then the year changed, but ne'er was dead,
Nor was the autumn-tide more sad
Than very spring; and all unclad
Folk went upon the harmless snow,
For not yet did midwinter know
The biting frost and icy wind,
The very east was soft and kind.

And on the crown of July days,
All heedless of the mid-day blaze,
Unshaded by the rosy bowers,
Unscorched beside the tulip flowers,
The snow-white naked girl might stand;
Or fearless thrust her tender hand
Amidst the thornless rose-bushes.

Then, 'mid the twilight of the trees
None feared the yellow beast to meet;
Smiling to feel their languid feet
Licked by the serpent's forked tongue.
For then no clattering horn had rung
Through those green glades, or made afraid
The timid dwellers in the shade.
No lust of strength, no fear of death
Had driven men, with shortened breath,
The stag's wide-open eyes to watch;
No shafts to slay, no nets to catch,
Were yet; unyoked the neat might play
On untilled meads and mountains grey;
Unshorn the silly sheep might rove.

Nor knew that world-consuming love,
Mother of hate, or envy cold,
Or rage for fame, or thirst for gold,
Or longing for the ways untried,
Which ravening and unsatisfied,
Draw shortened lives of men to hell.

Alas ! what profit now to tell
The long unweary lives of men
Of past days — threescore years and ten,
Unbent, unwrinkled, beautiful,
Regarding not death's flower-crowned skull,
But with some damsel intertwined
In such love as leaves hope behind.

Alas, the vanished days of bliss !
Will no God send some dream of this,
That we may know what it has been ?

Oh, thou, the chapleted with green,
Thou purple-stained, but not with blood,
Who on the edge of some cool wood
Forgettest the grim Indian plain,
And all the strife and all the pain,
While in thy sight the must foams out,
And maid and man, with cry and shout,
Toil while thou laughest, think of us,
And drive away these piteous,
Formless, and wailing thoughts, that press
About our hour of happiness.

Lyæus, King ! by thee alone
To song may change our tuneless moan,
The murmur of the bitter sea
To ancient tales be changed by thee.
By thee the unnamed smouldering fire
Within our hearts turns to desire
Sweet, amorous, half satisfied ;
Through thee the doubtful years untried
Seem fair to us and fortunate,
In spite of death, in spite of fate.

"O DEATH, THAT MAKETH LIFE SO SWEET.¹⁵"

O DEATH, that maketh life so sweet,
O fear, with mirth before thy feet,
What have ye yet in store for us,
The conquerors, the glorious ?

Men say : " For fear that thou shouldst die
To-morrow, let to-day pass by
Flower-crowned and singing ; " yet have we
Passed our to-day upon the sea,
Or in a poisonous unknown land,
With fear and death on either hand,
And listless when the day was done
Have scarcely hoped to see the sun
Dawn on the morrow of the earth,
Nor in our hearts have thought of mirth.
And while the world lasts, scarce again
Shall any sons of men bear pain
Like we have borne, yet be alive.

So surely not in vain we strive
Like other men for our reward ;
Sweet peace and deep, the chequered sward
Beneath the ancient mulberry-trees,
The smooth-paved gilded palaces,
Where the shy thin-clad damsels sweet
Make music with their gold-ringed feet.
The fountain court amidst of it,
Where the short-haired slave maidens sit,
While on the veined pavement lie
The honied things and spicery
Their arms have borne from out the town.

The dancers on the thymy down
In summer twilight, when the earth
Is still of all things but their mirth,
And echoes borne upon the wind
Of others in like way entwined.

The merchant-town's fair market-place,
Where over many a changing face
The pigeons of the temple flit,
And still the outland merchants sit

Like kings above their merchandise,
Lying to foolish men and wise.

Ah ! if they heard that we were come
Into the bay, and bringing home
That which all men have talked about,
Some men with rage, and some with doubt,
Some with desire, and some with praise;
Then would the people throng the ways,
Nor heed the outland merchandise,
Nor any talk, from fools or wise,
But tales of our accomplished quest.

What soul within the house shall rest
When we come home? The wily king
Shall leave his throne to see the thing;
No man shall keep the landward gate,
The hurried traveller shall wait
Until our bulwarks graze the quay,
Unslain the milk-white bull shall be
Beside the quivering altar-flame;
Scarce shall the maiden clasp for shame
Over her breast the raiment thin
The morn that Argo cometh in.

Then cometh happy life again
That payeth well our toil and pain
In that sweet hour, when all our woe
But as a pensive tale we know,
Nor yet remember deadly fear;
For surely now if death be near,
Unthought-of is it, and unseen
When sweet is, that hath bitter been.

THE ARGONAUTS AND THE SIRENS.¹⁶

A MOMENT Jason gazed, then through the waist
Ran swiftly, and with trembling hands made haste
To trim the sail, then to the tiller ran,
And thrust aside the skilled Milesian man,
Who with half-open mouth, and dreamy eyes,
Stood steering Argo to that land of lies;
But as he staggered forward, Jason's hand
Hard on the tiller steered away from land,

And as her head a little now fell off
 Unto the wide sea, did he shout this scoff
 To Thracian Orpheus: "Minstrel, shall we die,
 Because thou hast forgotten utterly
 What things she taught thee that men call divine?
 Or will thy measures but lead folk to wine,
 And scented beds, and not to noble deeds?
 Or will they fail as fail the shepherd's reeds
 Before the trumpet, when these sea-witches
 Pipe shrilly to the washing of the seas?
 I am a man, and these but beasts, but thou
 Giving these souls, that all were men ere now,
 Shall be a very God and not a man!"

So spake he; but his fingers Orpheus ran
 Over the strings, and sighing turned away
 From that fair ending of the sunny bay;
 But as his well-skilled hands were preluding
 What his heart swelled with, they began to sing
 With pleading voices from the yellow sands,
 Clustered together, with appealing hands
 Reached out to Argo as the great sail drew,
 While o'er their white limbs sharp the spray shower
 flew,

Since they spared not to set white feet among
 The cold waves heedless of their honied song.

Sweetly they sang, and still the answer came
 Piercing and clear from him, as bursts the flame
 From out the furnace in the moonless night;
 Yet, as their words are no more known aright,
 Through lapse of many ages, and no man
 Can any more across the waters wan
 Behold those singing women of the sea,
 Once more I pray you all to pardon me,
 If with my feeble voice and harsh I sing
 From what dim memories may chance to cling
 About men's hearts, of lovely things once sung
 Beside the sea, while yet the world was young.

* * * * *

THE SIRENS.

Alas! poor souls and timorous,
 Will ye draw nigh to gaze at us

And see if we are fair indeed,
 For such as we shall be your meed,
 There, where our hearts would have you go.
 And where can the earth-dwellers show
 In any land such loveliness
 As that wherewith your eyes we bless,
 O wanderers of the Minyæ,
 Worn toilers over land and sea?

ORPHEUS.

Fair as the lightning thwart the sky,
 As sun-dyed snow upon the high
 Untrodden heaps of threatening stone
 The eagle looks upon alone,
 O fair as the doomed victim's wreath,
 O fair as deadly sleep and death,
 What will ye with them, earthly men,
 To mate your three-score years and ten?
 Toil rather, suffer and be free,
 Betwixt the green earth and the sea.

* * * * *

THE SIRENS.

Shall we not rise with you at night,
 Up through the shimmering green twilight,
 That maketh there our changeless day,
 Then going through the moonlight grey,
 Shall we not sit upon these sands,
 To think upon the troublous lands
 Long left behind, where once ye were,
 When every day brought change and fear?
 There, with white arms about you twined,
 And shuddering somewhat at the wind
 That ye rejoiced erewhile to meet,
 Be happy, while old stories sweet,
 Half understood, float round your ears,
 And fill your eyes with happy tears.

Ah! while we sing unto you there,
 As now we sing, with yellow hair
 Blown round about these pearly limbs,
 While underneath the grey sky swims
 The light shell-sailor of the waves,

And to our song, from sea-filled caves
Booms out an echoing harmony,
Shall ye not love the peaceful sea ?

ORPHEUS.

Nigh the vine-covered hillocks green,
In days ago, have I not seen
The brown-clad maidens amorous,
Below the long rose-trellised house,
Dance to the querulous pipe and shrill,
When the grey shadow of the hill
Was lengthening at the end of day ?
Not shadowy nor pale were they,
But limbed like those who 'twixt the trees,
Follow the swift of Goddesses.
Sunburnt they are somewhat, indeed,
To where the rough brown woollen weed
Is drawn across their bosoms sweet,
Or cast from off their dancing feet ;
But yet the stars, the moonlight grey,
The water wan, the dawn of day,
Can see their bodies fair and white
As Hers, who once, for man's delight,
Before the world grew hard and old,
Came o'er the bitter sea and cold ;
And surely those that met me there,
Her handmaidens and subjects were ;
And shame-faced, half-repressed desire
Had lit their glorious eyes with fire,
That maddens eager hearts of men.
O would that I were with them when
The risen moon is gathering light,
And yellow from the homestead white
The windows gleam ; but verily
This waits us o'er a little sea.

THE SIRENS.

Come to the land where none grows old,
And none is rash or over-bold,
Nor any noise there is or war,
Or rumour from wild lands afar,

Or plagues, or birth and death of kings;
No vain desire of unknown things
Shall vex you there, no hope or fear
Of that which never draweth near;
But in that lovely land and still
Ye may remember what ye will,
And what ye will, forget for aye.

So while the kingdoms pass away,
Ye sea-beat hardened toilers erst,
Unresting, for vain fame athirst,
Shall be at peace for evermore,
With hearts fulfilled of Godlike lore,
And calm, unwavering Godlike love,
No lapse of time can turn or move.
There, ages after your fair Fleece
Is clean forgotten, yea, and Greece
Is no more counted glorious,
Alone with us, alone with us,
Alone with us, dwell happily,
Beneath our trembling roof of sea.

ORPHEUS.

Ah! do ye weary of the strife
And long to change this eager life
For shadowy and dull hopelessness,
Thinking indeed to gain no less
Than far from this grey light to lie,
And there to die and not to die,
To be as if ye ne'er had been,
Yet keep your memory fresh and green,
To have no thought of good or ill,
Yet feed your fill of pleasure still?
O idle dream! Ah, verily
If it shall happen unto me
That I have thought of anything,
When o'er my bones the sea-fowl sing,
And I lie dead, how shall I pine
For those fresh joys that once were mine,
On this green fount of joy and mirth,
The ever young and glorious earth;
Then, helpless, shall I call to mind
Thoughts of the sweet flower-scented wind,

The dew, the gentle rain at night,
The wonder-working snow and white,
The song of birds, the water's fall,
The sun that maketh bliss of all ;
Yea, this our toil and victory,
The tyrannous and conquered sea.

THE SIRENS.

Ah, will ye go, and whither then
Will ye go from us, soon to die,
To fill your three-score years and ten,
With many an unnamed misery ?

And this the wretchedest of all,
That when upon your lonely eyes
The last faint heaviness shall fall
Ye shall bethink you of our cries.

Come back, nor grown old, seek in vain
To hear us sing across the sea.
Come back, come back, come back again,
Come back, O fearful Minyæ !

ORPHEUS.

Ah, once again, ah, once again,
The black prow plunges through the sea,
Nor yet shall all your toil be vain,
Nor ye forgot, O Minyæ.

In such wise sang the Thracian, in such wise
Out gushed the Sirens' deadly melodies ;
But long before the mingled song was done,
Back to the oars the Minyæ, one by one,
Slunk silently ; though many an one sighed sore,
As his strong fingers met the wood once more,
And from his breast the toilsome breathing came.

TO GEOFFREY CHAUCER.¹⁷

WOULD that I
Had but some portion of that mastery
That from the rose-hung lanes of woody Kent
Through these five hundred years such songs have sent
To us, who, meshed within this smoky net
Of unrejoicing labor, love them yet.
And thou, O Master! — Yea, my Master still,
Whatever feet have scaled Parnassus' hill,
Since like thy measures, clear and sweet and strong,
Thames' stream scarce fettered drave the dace along
Unto the bastioned bridge, his only chain. —
O Master, pardon me, if yet in vain
Thou art my Master, and I fail to bring
Before men's eyes the image of the thing
My heart is filled with: thou whose dreamy eyes
Beheld the flush to Cressid's cheek arise,
When Troilus rode up the praising street,
As clearly as they saw thy townsmen meet
Those who in vineyards of Poictou withstood
The glittering horror of the steel-topped wood.

THE EARTHLY PARADISE.
(SELECTIONS.)

THE EARTHLY PARADISE.¹⁹

AN APOLOGY.

OF Heaven or Hell I have no power to sing,
I cannot ease the burden of your fears,
Or make quick-coming death a little thing,
Or bring again the pleasure of past years,
Nor for my words shall ye forget your tears,
Or hope again, for aught that I can say,
The idle singer of an empty day.

But rather, when aweary of your mirth,
From full hearts still unsatisfied ye sigh,
And, feeling kindly unto all the earth,
Grudge every minute as it passes by,
Made the more mindful that the sweet days die —
— Remember me a little then I pray,
The idle singer of an empty day.

The heavy trouble, the bewildering care
That weighs us down who live and earn our bread,
These idle verses have no power to bear;
So let me sing of names remembered,
Because they, living not, can ne'er be dead,
Or long time take their memory quite away
From us poor singers of an empty day.

Dreamer of dreams, born out of my due time,
Why should I strive to set the crooked straight?
Let it suffice me that my murmuring rhyme
Beats with light wing against the ivory gate,
Telling a tale not too importunate
To those who in the sleepy region stay,
Lulled by the singer of an empty day.

Folk say, a wizard to a northern king
At Christmas-tide such wondrous things did show,
That through one window men beheld the spring,
And through another saw the summer glow,
And through a third the fruited vines a-row,
While still, unheard, but in its wonted way,
Piped the drear wind of that December day.

So with this Earthly Paradise it is,
If ye will read aright, and pardon me,
Who strive to build a shadowy isle of bliss
Midmost the beating of the steely sea,
Where tossed about all hearts of men must be;
Whose ravening monsters mighty men shall slay,
Not the poor singer of an empty day.

THE AUTHOR TO THE READER.

THINK, listener, that I had the luck to stand,
Awhile ago within a flowery land,
Fair beyond words; that thence I brought away
Some blossoms that before my footsteps lay,
Not plucked by me, not over-fresh or bright;
Yet, since they minded me of that delight,
Within the pages of this book I laid
Their tender petals, there in peace to fade.
Dry are they now, and void of all their scent
And lovely colour, yet what once was meant
By these dull stains, some men may yet descry
As dead upon the quivering leaves they lie.

Behold them here, and mock me if you will,
But yet believe no scorn of men can kill
My love of that fair land wherefrom they came,
Where midst the grass their petals once did flame.

Moreover, since that land as ye should know,
Bears not alone the gems for summer's show,
Or gold and pearls for fresh green-coated spring,
Or rich adornment for the flickering wing

Of fleeting autumn, but hath little fear
For the white conqueror of the fruitful year;
So in these pages month by month I show
Some portion of the flowers that erst did blow
In lovely meadows of the varying land,
Wherein erewhile I had the luck to stand.

L'ENVOI.

HERE are we for the last time face to face,
Thou and I, Book, before I bid thee speed
Upon thy perilous journey to that place
For which I have done on thee pilgrim's weed,
Striving to get thee all things for thy need —
— I love thee, whatso time or men may say
Of the poor singer of an empty day.

Good reason why I love thee, e'en if thou
Be mocked or clean forgot as time wears on;
For ever as thy fashioning did grow,
Kind word and praise because of thee I won
From those without whom were my world all gone,
My hope fallen dead, my singing cast away,
And I set soothly in an empty day.

I love thee; yet this last time must it be
That thou must hold thy peace and I must speak,
Lest if thou babble I begin to see
Thy gear too thin, thy limbs and heart too weak,
To find the land thou goest forth to seek —
— Though what harm if thou die upon the way,
Thou idle singer of an empty day?

But though this land desired thou never reach,
Yet folk who know it mayst thou meet or death;
Therefore a word unto thee would I teach
To answer these, who, noting thy weak breath,
Thy wandering eyes, thy heart of little faith,
May make thy fond desire a sport and play,
Mocking the singer of an empty day.

That land's name, say'st thou? and the road thereto?
Nay, Book, thou mockest, saying thou know'st it not;
Surely no book of verse I ever knew
But ever was the heart within him hot
To gain the Land of Matters Unforgot—
—There, now we both laugh—as the whole world may,
At us poor singers of an empty day.

Nay, let it pass, and hearken! Hast thou heard
That therein I believe I have a friend,
Of whom for love I may not be afraid?
It is to him indeed I bid thee wend;
Yea, he perchance may meet thee ere thou end,
Dying so far off from the hedge of bay,
Thou idle singer of an empty day!

Well, think of him, I bid thee, on the road,
And if it hap that midst of thy defeat,
Fainting beneath thy follies' heavy load,
My Master, GEOFFREY CHAUCER, thou do meet,
Then shalt thou win a space of rest full sweet;
Then be thou bold, and speak the words I say,
The idle singer of an empty day!

“O Master, O thou great of heart and tongue,
Thou well mayst ask me why I wander here,
In raiment rent of stories oft besung!
But of thy gentleness draw thou anear,
And then the heart of one who held thee dear
Mayst thou behold! So near as that I lay
Unto the singer of an empty day.

“For this he ever said, who sent me forth
To seek a place amid thy company;
That howsoever little was my worth,
Yet was he worth e'en just so much as I;
He said that rhyme hath little skill to lie;
Nor feigned to cast his worser part away;
In idle singing for an empty day.

“I have beheld him tremble oft enough
At things he could not choose but trust to me,
Although he knew the world was wise and rough:

And never did he fail to let me see
His love, — his folly and faithlessness, maybe;
And still in turn I gave him voice to pray
Such prayers as cling about an empty day.

“Thou, keen-eyed, reading me, mayst read him through,
For surely little is there left behind;
No power great deeds unnameable to do;
No knowledge for which words he may not find,
No love of things as vague as autumn wind —
— Earth of the earth lies hidden by my clay,
The idle singer of an empty day !

“Children we twain are, saith he, late made wise
In love, but in all else most childish still,
And seeking still the pleasure of our eyes,
And what our ears with sweetest sounds may fill;
Not fearing Love, lest these things he should kill;
Howe'er his pain by pleasure doth he lay,
Making a strange tale of an empty day.

“Death have we hated, knowing not what it meant;
Life have we loved, through green leaf and through sere,
Though still the less we knew of its intent:
The Earth and Heaven through countless year on year,
Slow changing, were to us but curtains fair,
Hung round about a little room, where play
Weeping and laughter of man's empty day.

“O Master, if thine heart could love us yet,
Spite of things left undone, and wrongly done,
Some place in loving hearts then should we get,
For thou, sweet-souled, didst never stand alone,
But knew'st the joy and woe of many an one —
— By lovers dead, who live through thee, we pray,
Help thou us singers of an empty day !”

Fearest thou, Book, what answer thou mayst gain
Lest he should scorn thee, and thereof thou die ?
Nay, it shall not be. — Thou mayst toil in vain,
And never draw the House of Fame anigh;
Yet he and his shall know whereof we cry,
Shall call it not ill done to strive to lay
The ghosts that crowd about life's empty day.

Then let the others go! and if indeed
In some old garden thou and I have wrought,
And made fresh flowers spring up from hoarded seed,
And fragrance of old days and deeds have brought
Back to folk weary; all was not for nought.
— No little part it was for me to play —
The idle singer of an empty day.

THE MONTHS.¹⁹

MARCH.

SLAYER of the winter, art thou here again?
O welcome, thou that bring'st the summer nigh!
The bitter wind makes not thy victory vain,
Nor will we mock thee for thy faint blue sky.
Welcome, O March! whose kindly days and dry
Make April ready for the throstle's song,
Thou first redresser of the winter's wrong!

Yea, welcome March! and though I die ere June,
Yet for the hope of life I give thee praise,
Striving to swell the burden of the tune
That even now I hear thy brown birds raise,
Unmindful of the past or coming days;
Who sing: "O joy! a new year is begun:
What happiness to look upon the sun!"

Ah, what begetteth all this storm of bliss
But death himself, who crying solemnly,
E'en from the heart of sweet Forgetfulness,
Bids us "Rejoice, lest pleasureless ye die.
Within a little time must ye go by.
Stretch forth your open hands, and while ye live
Take all the gifts that Death and Life may give."

APRIL.

O fair midspring, besung so oft and oft,
How can I praise thy loveliness enow?
Thy sun that burns not, and thy breezes soft

That o'er the blossoms of the orchard blow,
The thousand things that 'neath the young leaves grow,
The hopes and chances of the growing year,
Winter forgotten long, and summer near.

When summer brings the lily and the rose,
She brings us fear; her very death she brings
Hid in her anxious heart, the forge of woes;
And, dull with fear, no more the mavis sings.
But thou! thou diest not, but thy fresh life clings
About the fainting autumn's sweet decay,
When in the earth the hopeful seed they lay.

Ah! life of all the year, why yet do I
Amid thy snowy blossoms' fragrant drift,
Still long for that which never draweth nigh,
Striving my pleasure from my pain to sift,
Some weight from off my fluttering mirth to lift?
—Now, when far bells are ringing, "Come again,
Come back, past years! why will ye pass in vain?"

MAY.

O love, this morn when the sweet nightingale
Had so long finished all he had to say,
That thou hadst slept, and sleep had told his tale;
And midst a peaceful dream had stolen away
In fragrant dawning of the first of May,
Didst thou see aught? didst thou hear voices sing
Ere to the risen sun the bells 'gan ring?

For then methought the Lord of Love went by
To take possession of his flowery throne,
Ringed round with maids, and youths, and minstrelsy;
A little while I sighed to find him gone,
A little while the dawning was alone,
And the light gathered; then I held my breath,
And shuddered at the sight of Eld and Death.

Alas! Love passed me in the twilight dun,
His music hushed the wakening ousel's song;
But on these twain shone out the golden sun,

And o'er their heads the brown bird's tune was strong,
As shivering, 'twixt the trees they stole along;
None noted aught their noiseless passing by,
The world had quite forgotten it must die.

JUNE.

O June, O June, that we desired so,
Wilt thou not make us happy on this day?
Across the river thy soft breezes blow
Sweet with the scent of beanfields far away,
Above our heads rustle the aspens grey,
Calm is the sky with harmless clouds beset,
No thought of storm the morning vexes yet.

See, we have left our hopes and fears behind
To give our very hearts up unto thee;
What better place than this then could we find
By this sweet stream that knows not of the sea,
That guesses not the city's misery,
This little stream whose hamlets scarce have names,
This far-off, lonely mother of the Thames?

Here then, O June, thy kindness will we take;
And if indeed but pensive men we seem,
What should we do? thou wouldst not have us wake
From out the arms of this rare happy dream
And wish to leave the murmur of the stream,
The rustling boughs, the twitter of the birds,
And all thy thousand peaceful happy words.

JULY.

Fair was the morn to-day, the blossoms' scent
Floated across the fresh grass, and the bees
With low vexed song from rose to lily went;
A gentle wind was in the heavy trees,
And thine eyes shone with joyous memories;
Fair was the early morn, and fair wert thou,
And I was happy — Ah, be happy now!

Peace and content without us, love within
That hour there was, now thunder and wild rain

Have wrapped the cowering world, and foolish sin,
And nameless pride, have made us wise in vain;
Ah, love! although the morn shall come again,
And on new rose-buds the new sun shall smile,
Can we regain what we have lost meanwhile?

E'en now the west grows clear of storm and threat,
But midst the lightning did the fair sun die —
— Ah, he shall rise again for ages yet,
He cannot waste his life — but thou and I —
Who knows if next morn this felicity
My lips may feel, or if thou still shalt live
This seal of love renewed once more to give?

AUGUST.

Across the gap made by our English hinds,
Amidst the Romans' handiwork, behold
Far off the long-roofed church; the shepherd binds
The withy round the hurdles of his fold,
Down in the foss the river fed of old,
That through long lapse of time has grown to be
The little grassy valley that you see.

Rest here awhile, not yet the eve is still,
The bees are wandering yet, and you may hear
The barley mowers on the trenched hill,
The sheep-bells, and the restless changing weir,
All little sounds made musical and clear
Beneath the sky that burning August gives,
While yet the thought of glorious Summer lives.

Ah, love! such happy days, such days as these,
Must we still waste them, craving for the best,
Like lovers o'er the painted images
Of those who once their yearning hearts have blessed?
Have we been happy on our day of rest?
Thine eyes say "yes," — but if it came again,
Perchance its ending would not seem so vain.

SEPTEMBER.

O come at last, to whom the spring-tide's hope
Looked for through blossoms, what hast thou for me?

Green grows the grass upon the dewy slope
Beneath thy gold-hung, grey-leaved apple-tree
Moveless, e'en as the autumn fain would be
That shades its sad eyes from the rising sun
And weeps at eve because the day is done.

What vision wilt thou give me, autumn morn,
To make thy pensive sweetness more complete?
What tale, ne'er to be told, of folk unborn?
What images of grey-clad damsels sweet
Shall cross thy sward with dainty noiseless feet?
What nameless shamefast longings made alive,
Soft-eyed September, will thy sad heart give?

Look long, O longing eyes, and look in vain!
Strain idly, aching heart, and yet be wise,
And hope no more for things to come again
That thou beheldest once with careless eyes!
Like a new-wakened man thou art, who tries
To dream again the dream that made him glad
When in his arms his loving love he had.

OCTOBER.

O love, turn from the unchanging sea and gaze
Down these grey slopes upon the year grown old,
A-dying mid the autumn-scented haze,
That hangeth o'er the hollow in the wold,
Where the wind-bitten ancient elms enfold
Grey church, long barn, orchard, and red-roofed stead,
Wrought in dead days for men a long while dead.

Come down, O love; may not our hands still meet,
Since still we live to-day, forgetting June,
Forgetting May, deeming October sweet —
— O hearken, hearken! through the afternoon,
The grey tower sings a strange old tinkling tune!
Sweet, sweet, and sad, the toiling year's last breath,
Too satiate of life to strive with death.

And we too — will it not be soft and kind,
That rest from life, from patience and from pain;
That rest from bliss we know not when we find;

That rest from Love which ne'er the end can gain? —
— Hark, how the tune swells, that erewhile did wane!
Look up, love! — ah, cling close and never move!
How can I have enough of life and love?

NOVEMBER.

Are thine eyes weary? is thy heart too sick
To struggle any more with doubt and thought,
Whose formless veil draws darkening now and thick
Across thee, e'en as smoke-tinged mist-wreaths brought
Down a fair dale to make it blind and nought?
Art thou so weary that no world there seems
Beyond these four walls, hung with pain and dreams?

Look out upon the real world, where the moon,
Half-way 'twixt root and crown of these high trees,
Turns the dead midnight into dreamy noon,
Silent and full of wonders, for the breeze
Died at the sunset, and no images,
No hopes of day, are left in sky or earth —
Is it not fair, and of most wondrous worth?

Yea, I have looked, and seen November there;
The changeless seal of change it seemed to be,
Fair death of things that, living once, were fair;
Bright sign of loneliness too great for me,
Strange image of the dread eternity,
In whose void patience how can these have part,
These outstretched feverish hands, this restless heart?

DECEMBER.

Dead lonely night and all streets quiet now,
Thin o'er the moon the hindmost cloud swims past
Of that great rack that brought us up the snow;
On earth strange shadows o'er the snow are cast;
Pale stars, bright moon, swift cloud make heaven so vast
That earth left silent by the wind of night
Seems shrunken 'neath the grey unmeasured height.

Ah! through the hush the looked-for midnight clangs!
And then, e'en while its last stroke's solemn drone

In the cold air by unlit windows hangs,
Out break the bells above the year foredone,
Change, kindness lost, love left unloved alone;
Till their despairing sweetness makes thee deem
Thou once wert loved, if but amidst a dream.

O thou who clingest still to life and love,
Though nought of good, no God thou mayst discern,
Though nought that is, thine utmost woe can move,
Though no soul knows wherewith thine heart doth yearn,
Yet, since thy weary lips no curse can learn,
Cast no least thing thou lovedst once away,
Since yet perchance thine eyes shall see the day.

JANUARY.

From this dull rainy undersky and low,
This murky ending of a leaden day,
That never knew the sun, this half-thawed snow,
These tossing black boughs faint against the grey
Of gathering night, thou turnest, dear, away
Silent, but with thy scarce-seen kindly smile
Sent through the dusk my longing to beguile.

There, the lights gleam, and all is dark without!
And in the sudden change our eyes meet dazed —
O look, love, look again! the veil of doubt
Just for one flash, past counting, then was raised!
O eyes of heaven, as clear thy sweet soul blazed
On mine a moment! O come back again
Strange rest and dear amid the long dull pain!

Nay, nay, gone by! though there she sitteth still,
With wide grey eyes so frank and fathomless —
Be patient, heart, thy days they yet shall fill
With utter rest — Yea, now thy pain they bless,
And feed thy last hope of the world's redress —
O unseen hurrying rack! O wailing wind!
What rest and where go ye this night to find?

FEBRUARY.

Noon — and the north-west sweeps the empty road,
The rain-washed fields from hedge to hedge are bare;

Beneath the leafless elms some hind's abode
Looks small and void, and no smoke meets the air
From its poor hearth; one lonely rook doth dare
The gale, and beats above the unseen corn,
Then turns, and whirling down the wind is borne.

Shall it not hap that on some dawn of May
Thou shalt awake, and, thinking of days dead,
See nothing clear but this same dreary day,
Of all the days that have passed o'er thine head?
Shalt thou not wonder, looking from thy bed,
Through green leaves on the windless east afire,
That this day too thine heart doth still desire?

Shalt thou not wonder that it liveth yet,
The useless hope, the useless craving pain,
That made thy face, that lonely noontide, wet
With more than beating of the chilly rain?
Shalt thou not hope for joy new born again,
Since no grief ever born can ever die
Through changeless change of seasons passing by?

SONG.²⁰

From THE LOVE OF ALCESTIS.

O DWELLERS on the lovely earth,
Why will ye break your rest and mirth
To weary us with fruitless prayer;
Why will ye toil and take such care
For children's children yet unborn,
And garner store of strife and scorn
To gain a scarce-remembered name,
Cumbered with lies and soiled with shame?
And if the gods care not for you,
What is this folly ye must do
To win some mortal's feeble heart?
O fools! when each man plays his part,
And heeds his fellow little more
Than these blue waves that kiss the shore

Take heed of how the daisies grow.
O fools ! and if ye could but know
How fair a world to you is given.

O brooder on the hills of heaven,
When for my sin thou drav'st me forth,
Hadst thou forgot what this was worth,
Thine own hand had made ? The tears of men,
The death of threescore years and ten,
The trembling of the timorous race —
Had these things so bedimmed the place
Thine own hand made, thou couldst not know
To what a heaven the earth might grow
If fear beneath the earth were laid,
If hope failed not, nor love decayed ?

SONG.²¹

From CUPID AND PSYCHE.

O PENSIVE, tender maid, downcast and shy,
Who turnest pale e'en at the name of love,
And with flushed face must pass the elm-tree by,
Ashamed to hear the passionate grey dove
Moan to his mate, thee too the god shall move,
Thee too the maidens shall ungird one day,
And with thy girdle put thy shame away.

What then, and shall white winter ne'er be done
Because the glittering frosty morn is fair ?
Because against the early-setting sun
Bright show the gilded boughs, though waste and bare ?
Because the robin singeth free from care ?
Ah ! these are memories of a better day
When on earth's face the lips of summer lay.

Come then, beloved one, for such as thee
Love loveth, and their hearts he knoweth well,
Who hoard their moments of felicity,
As misers hoard the medals that they tell,
Lest on the earth but paupers they should dwell:

"We hide our love to bless another day;
The world is hard, youth passes quick," they say.

Ah, little ones, but if ye could forget
Amidst your outpoured love that you must die,
Then ye, my servants, were death's conquerors yet,
And love to you should be eternity,
How quick soever might the days go by:
Yes, ye are made immortal on the day
Ye cease the dusty grains of time to weigh.

Thou hearkenest, love? O, make no semblance then
That thou art loved, but as thy custom is
Turn thy grey eyes away from eyes of men.
With hands down-dropped, that tremble with thy bliss,
With hidden eyes, take thy first lover's kiss;
Call this eternity which is to-day,
Nor dream that this our love can pass away.

SONG.

From THE HILL OF VENUS.

BEFORE our lady came on earth
Little there was of joy or mirth;
About the borders of the sea
The sea-folk wandered heavily;
About the wintry river side
The weary fishers would abide.

Alone within the weaving-room
The girls would sit before the loom,
And sing no song, and play no play;
Alone from dawn to hot mid-day,
From mid-day unto evening,
The men afield would work, nor sing,
'Mid weary thoughts of man and God,
Before thy feet the wet ways trod.

Unkissed the merchant bore his care,
Unkissed the knights went out to war,

Unkissed the mariner came home,
Unkissed the minstrel men did roam.

Or in the stream the maids would stare,
Nor know why they were made so fair;
Their yellow locks, their bosoms white,
Their limbs well wrought for all delight,
Seemed foolish things that waited death,
As hopeless as the flowers beneath
The weariness of unkissed feet:
No life was bitter then, or sweet.

Therefore, O Venus, well may we
Praise the green ridges of the sea
O'er which, upon a happy day,
Thou cam'st to take our shame away.
Well may we praise the curdling foam
Amidst the which thy feet did bloom,
Flowers of the gods; the yellow sand
They kissed atwixt the sea and land;
The bee-beset ripe-seeded grass,
Through which thy fine limbs first did pass;
The purple-dusted butterfly,
First blown against thy quivering thigh;
The first red rose that touched thy side,
And over-blown and fainting died;
The flickering of the orange shade,
Where first in sleep thy limbs were laid;
The happy day's sweet life and death,
Whose air first caught thy balmy breath—
Yea, all these things well praised may be,
But with what words shall we praise thee—
O Venus, O thou love alive,
Born to give peace to souls that strive?

SONG.

From THE MAN WHO NEVER LAUGHED AGAIN.

O THOU who drawest nigh across the sea,
O heart that seekest Love perpetually,
Nor know'st his name, come now at last to me!

Come, thirst of love thy lips too long have borne,
Hunger of love thy heart hath long outworn,
Speech hadst thou but to call thyself forlorn.

The seeker finds now, the parched lips are led
To sweet full streams, the hungry heart is fed,
And song springs up from moans of sorrow dead.

Draw nigh, draw nigh, and tell me all thy tale;
In words grown sweet since all the woe doth fail,
Show me wherewith thou didst thy woe bewail.

Draw nigh, draw nigh, belovèd! think of these
That stand around as well-wrought images,
Earless and eyeless as these trembling trees.

I think the sky calls living none but three:
The God that looketh thence and thee and me;
And He made us, but we made Love to be.

Think not of time, then, for thou shalt not die
How soon soever shall the world go by,
And nought be left but God and thou and I.

And yet, O love, why makest thou delay?
Life comes not till thou comest, and the day
That knows no end may yet be cast away.

ATALANTA'S RACE.²²

ARGUMENT.

Atalanta, daughter of King Schœneus, not willing to lose her virgin's estate, made it a law to all suitors that they should run a race with her in the public place, and if they failed to overcome her should die unrevenge'd; and thus many brave men perished. At last came Milanion, the son of Amphi-damas, who, outrunning her with the help of Venus, gained the virgin and wedded her.

THROUGH thick Arcadian woods a hunter went,
Following the beasts up, on a fresh spring day;
But since his horn-tipped bow but seldom bent,
Now at the noontide nought had happed to slay,
Within a vale he called his hounds away,

Hearkening the echoes of his lone voice cling
About the cliffs and through the beech-trees ring.

But when they ended, still awhile he stood,
And but the sweet familiar thrush could hear,
And all the day-long noises of the wood,
And o'er the dry leaves of the vanished year
His hounds' feet pattering as they drew anear,
And heavy breathing from their heads low hung,
To see the mighty cornel bow unstrung.

Then smiling did he turn to leave the place,
But with his first step some new fleeting thought
A shadow cast across his sun-burnt face ;
I think the golden net that April brought
From some warm world his wavering soul had caught ;
For, sunk in vague sweet longing, did he go
Betwixt the trees with doubtful steps and slow.

Yet howsoever slow he went, at last
The trees grew sparser, and the wood was done ;
Whereon one farewell backward look he cast,
Then, turning round to see what place was won,
With shaded eyes looked underneath the sun,
And o'er green meads and new-turned furrows brown
Beheld the gleaming of King Schœneus' town.

So thitherward he turned, and on each side
The folk were busy on the teeming land,
And man and maid from the brown furrows cried,
Or midst the newly-blossomed vines did stand,
And as the rustic weapon pressed the hand
Thought of the nodding of the well-filled ear,
Or how the knife the heavy bunch should shear.

Merry it was : about him sung the birds,
The spring flowers bloomed along the firm dry road,
The sleek-skinned mothers of the sharp-horned herds
Now for the barefoot milking-maidens lowed ;
While from the freshness of his blue abode,
Glad his death-bearing arrows to forget,
The broad sun blazed, nor scattered plagues as yet.

Through such fair things unto the gates he came,
And found them open, as though peace were there;
Wherethrough, unquestioned of his race or name,
He entered, and along the streets 'gan fare,
Which at the first of folk were well-nigh bare;
But pressing on, and going more hastily,
Men hurrying too he 'gan at last to see.

Following the last of these, he still pressed on,
Until an open space he came unto,
Where wreaths of fame had oft been lost and won,
For feats of strength folk there were wont to do.
And now our hunter looked for something new,
Because the whole wide space was bare, and stilled
The high seats were, with eager people filled.

There with the others to a seat he gat,
Whence he beheld a broidered canopy,
'Neath which in fair array King Schœneus sat
Upon his throne with councillors thereby;
And underneath his well-wrought seat and high,
He saw a golden image of the sun,
A silver image of the Fleet-foot One.

A brazen altar stood beneath their feet
Whereon a thin flame flickered in the wind,
Nigh this a herald clad in raiment meet
Made ready even now his horn to wind,
By whom a huge man held a sword, entwined
With yellow flowers; these stood a little space
From off the altar, nigh the starting-place.

And there two runners did the sign abide
Foot set to foot, — a young man slim and fair,
Crisp-haired, well knit, with firm limbs often tried
In places where no man his strength may spare;
Dainty his thin coat was, and on his hair
A golden circlet of renown he wore,
And in his hand an olive garland bore.

But on this day with whom shall he contend?
A maid stood by him like Diana clad

When in the woods she lists her bow to bend,
Too fair for one to look on and be glad,
Who scarcely yet has thirty summers had,
If he must still behold her from afar;
Too fair to let the world live free from war.

She seemed all earthly matters to forget;
Of all tormenting lines her face was clear,
Her wide grey eyes upon the goal were set
Calm and unmoved as though no soul were near;
But her foe trembled as a man in fear,
Nor from her loveliness one moment turned
His anxious face with fierce desire that burned.

Now through the hush there broke the trumpet's clang
Just as the setting sun made eventide.
Then from light feet a spurt of dust there sprang,
And swiftly were they running side by side;
But silent did the thronging folk abide
Until the turning-post was reached at last,
And round about it still abreast they passed.

But when the people saw how close they ran,
When half-way to the starting-point they were,
A cry of joy broke forth, whereat the man
Headed the white-foot runner, and drew near
Unto the very end of all his fear;
And scarce his straining feet the ground could feel,
And bliss unhop'd for o'er his heart 'gan steal.

But midst the loud victorious shouts he heard
Her footsteps drawing nearer, and the sound
Of fluttering raiment, and thereat afeard
His flushed and eager face he turned around,
And even then he felt her past him bound
Fleet as the wind, but scarcely saw her there
Till on the goal she laid her fingers fair.

There stood she breathing like a little child
Amid some warlike clamour laid asleep,
For no victorious joy her red lips smiled,
Her cheek its wonted freshness did but keep;
No glance lit up her clear grey eyes and deep,

Though some divine thought softened all her face
As once more rang the trumpet through the place.

But her late foe stopped short amidst his course,
One moment gazed upon her piteously,
Then with a groan his lingering feet did force
To leave the spot whence he her eyes could see ;
And, changed like one who knows his time must be
But short and bitter, without any word
He knelt before the bearer of the sword ;

Then high rose up the gleaming deadly blade,
Bared of its flowers, and through the crowded place
Was silence now, and midst of it the maid
Went by the poor wretch at a gentle pace,
And he to hers upturned his sad white face ;
Nor did his eyes behold another sight
Ere on his soul there fell eternal night.

So was the pageant ended, and all folk
Talking of this and that familiar thing
In little groups from that sad concourse broke,
For now the shrill bats were upon the wing,
And soon dark night would slay the evening,
And in dark gardens sang the nightingale
Her little-heeded, oft-repeated tale.

And with the last of all the hunter went,
Who, wondering at the strange sight he had seen,
Prayed an old man to tell him what it meant,
Both why the vanquished man so slain had been,
And if the maiden were an earthly queen,
Or rather what much more she seemed to be,
No sharer in the world's mortality.

"Stranger," said he, "I pray she soon may die
Whose lovely youth has slain so many an one !
King Schœneus' daughter is she verily,
Who when her eyes first looked upon the sun
Was fain to end her life but new begun,
For he had vowed to leave but men alone
Sprung from his loins when he from earth was gone.

“Therefore he bade one leave her in the wood,
And let wild things deal with her as they might,
But this being done, some cruel god thought good
To save her beauty in the world’s despite:
Folk say that her, so delicate and white
As now she is, a rough root-grubbing bear
Amidst her shapeless cubs at first did rear.

“In course of time the woodfolks slew her nurse,
And to their rude abode the youngling brought,
And reared her up to be a kingdom’s curse;
Who, grown a woman, of no kingdom thought,
But armed and swift, ’mid beasts destruction wrought,
Nor spared two shaggy centaur kings to slay
To whom her body seemed an easy prey.

“So to this city, led by fate, she came,
Whom known by signs, whereof I cannot tell,
King Schœneus for his child at last did claim,
Nor elsewhere since that day doth she dwell
Sending too many a noble soul to hell —
What! thine eyes glisten! what then, thinkest thou
Her shining head unto thy yoke to bow?

“Listen, my son, and love some other maid
For she the saffron gown will never wear,
And on no flower-strewn couch shall she be laid,
Nor shall her voice make glad a lover’s ear:
Yet if of Death thou hast not any fear,
Yea, rather, if thou lov’st him utterly,
Thou still may’st woo her ere thou com’st to die,

“Like him that on this day thou sawest lie dead;
For, fearing as I deem the sea-born one,
The maid has vowed e’en such a man to wed
As in the course her swift feet can outrun,
But whoso fails herein, his days are done:
He came the nighest that was slain to-day,
Although with him I deem she did but play.

“Behold, such mercy Atalanta gives
To those that long to win her loveliness;

Be wise ! be sure that many a maid there lives
Gentler than she, of beauty little less,
Whose swimming eyes thy loving words shall bless,
When in some garden, knee set close to knee,
Thou sing'st the song that love may teach to thee."

So to the hunter spake that ancient man,
And left him for his own home presently :
But he turned round, and through the moonlight wan
Reached the thick wood, and there 'twixt tree and tree
Distraught he passed the long night feverishly,
'Twixt sleep and waking, and at dawn arose
To wage hot war against his speechless foes.

There to the hart's flank seemed his shaft to grow,
As panting down the broad green glades he flew,
There by his horn the Dryads well might know
His thrust against the bear's heart had been true,
And there Adonis' bane his javelin slew,
But still in vain through rough and smooth he went,
For none the more his restlessness was spent.

So wandering, he to Argive cities came,
And in the lists with valiant men he stood,
And by great deeds he won him praise and fame,
And heaps of wealth for little-valued blood ;
But none of all these things, or life, seemed good
Unto his heart, where still unsatisfied
A ravenous longing warred with fear and pride.

Therefore it happed when but a month had gone
Since he had left King Schœneus' city old,
In hunting-gear again, again alone
The forest-bordered meads did he behold,
Where still 'mid thoughts of August's quivering gold
Folk hoed the wheat, and clipped the vine in trust
Of faint October's purple-foaming must.

And once again he passed the peaceful gate,
While to his beating heart his lips did lie,
That owning not victorious love and fate,
Said, half aloud, " And here too must I try,
To win of alien men the mastery,

And gather for my head fresh meed of fame
And cast new glory on my father's name."

In spite of that, how beat his heart, when first
Folk said to him, "And art thou come to see
That which still makes our city's name accurst
Among all mothers for its cruelty?
Then know indeed that fate is good to thee
Because to-morrow a new luckless one
Against the whitefoot maid is pledged to run."

So on the morrow with no curious eyes
As once he did, that piteous sight he saw,
Nor did that wonder in his heart arise
As toward the goal the conquering maid 'gan draw,
Nor did he gaze upon her eyes with awe,
Too full the pain of longing filled his heart
For fear or wonder there to have a part.

But O, how long the night was ere it went!
How long it was before the dawn begun
Showed to the wakening birds the sun's intent
That not in darkness should the world be done!
And then, and then, how long before the sun
Bade silently the toilers of the earth
Get forth to fruitless cares or empty mirth!

And long it seemed that in the market-place
He stood and saw the chaffering folk go by,
Ere from the ivory throne King Schœneus' face
Looked down upon the murmur royally,
But then came trembling that the time was nigh
When he midst pitying looks his love must claim,
And jeering voices must salute his name.

But as the throng he pierced to gain the throne,
His alien face distraught and anxious told
What hopeless errand he was bound upon,
And, each to each, folk whispered to behold
His godlike limbs; nay, and one woman old
As he went by must pluck him by the sleeve
And pray him yet that wretched love to leave.

For sidling up she said, "Canst thou live twice,
Fair son? canst thou have joyful youth again,
That thus thou goest to the sacrifice
Thyself the victim? nay then, all in vain
Thy mother bore her longing and her pain,
And one more maiden on the earth must dwell
Hopeless of joy, nor fearing death and hell.

"O fool, thou knowest not the compact then
That with the three-formed goddess she has made
To keep her from the loving lips of men,
And in no saffron gown to be arrayed,
And therewithal with glory to be paid,
And love of her the moonlit river sees
White 'gainst the shadow of the formless trees.

"Come back, and I myself will pray for thee
Unto the sea-born framer of delights,
To give thee her who on the earth may be
The fairest stirrer up to death and fights,
To quench with hopeful days and joyous nights
The flame that doth thy youthful heart consume:
Come back, nor give thy beauty to the tomb."

How should he listen to her earnest speech?
Words, such as he not once or twice had said
Unto himself, whose meaning scarce could reach
The firm abode of that sad hardihead —
He turned about, and through the marketstead
Swiftly he passed, until before the throne
In the cleared space he stood at last alone.

Then said the King, "Stranger, what dost thou here?
Have any of my folk done ill to thee?
Or art thou of the forest men in fear?
Or art thou of the sad fraternity
Who still will strive my daughter's mates to be,
Staking their lives to win to earthly bliss
The lonely maid, the friend of Artemis?"

"O King," he said, "thou sayest the word indeed;
Nor will I quit the strife till I have won

My sweet delight, or death to end my need.
And know that I am called Milanion,
Of King Amphidamas the well-loved son:
So fear not that to thy old name, O King,
Much loss or shame my victory will bring."

"Nay, Prince," said Schœneus, "welcome to this land
Thou wert indeed, if thou wert here to try
Thy strength 'gainst some one mighty of his hand;
Nor would we grudge thee well-won mastery.
But now, why wilt thou come to me to die,
And at my door lay down thy luckless head,
Swelling the band of the unhappy dead,

"Whose curses even now my heart doth fear?
Lo, I am old, and know what life can be,
And what a bitter thing is death anear.
O Son! be wise, and hearken unto me,
And if no other can be dear to thee,
At least as now, yet is the world full wide,
And bliss in seeming hopeless hearts may hide:

"But if thou lovest life, then all is lost."
"Nay, King," Milanion said, "thy words are vain.
Doubt not that I have counted well the cost.
But say, on what day wilt thou that I gain
Fulfilled delight, or death to end my pain?
Right glad were I if it could be to-day,
And all my doubts at rest for ever lay."

"Nay," said King Schœneus, "thus it shall not be,
But rather shalt thou let a month go by,
And weary with thy prayers for victory
What god thou know'st the kindest and most nigh.
So doing, still perchance thou shalt not die:
And with my goodwill wouldst thou have the maid,
For of the equal gods I grow afraid.

"And until then, O Prince, be thou my guest,
And all these troublous things awhile forget."

"Nay," said he, "couldst thou give my soul good rest,
And on mine head a sleepy garland set,
Then had I 'scaped the meshes of the net,

Nor shouldst thou hear from me another word ;
But now, make sharp thy fearful heading-sword.

“ Yet will I do what son of man may do,
And promise all the gods may most desire,
That to myself I may at least be true ;
And on that day my heart and limbs so tire,
With utmost strain and measureless desire,
That, at the worst, I may but fall asleep
When in the sunlight round that sword shall sweep.”

He went with that, nor anywhere would bide,
But unto Argos restlessly did wend ;
And there, as one who lays all hope aside,
Because the leech has said his life must end,
Silent farewell he bade to foe and friend,
And took his way unto the restless sea,
For there he deemed his rest and help might be.

Upon the shore of Argolis there stands
A temple to the goddess that he sought,
That, turned unto the lion-bearing lands,
Fenced from the east, of cold winds hath no thought,
Though to no homestead there the sheaves are brought,
No groaning press torments the close-clipped murk,
Lonely the fane stands, far from all men's work.

Pass through a close, set thick with myrtle-trees,
Through the brass doors that guard the holy place,
And entering, hear the washing of the seas
That twice a-day rise high above the base,
And with the south-west urging them, embrace
The marble feet of her that standeth there
That shrink not, naked though they be and fair.

Small is the fane through which the sea-wind sings
About Queen Venus' well-wrought image white,
But hung around are many precious things,
The gifts of those who, longing for delight,
Have hung them there within the goddess' sight,
And in return have taken at her hands
The living treasures of the Grecian lands.

And thither now has come Milanion,
And showed unto the priests' wide-open eyes
Gifts fairer than all those that there have shone,
Silk cloths, inwrought with Indian fantasies,
And bowls inscribed with sayings of the wise
Above the deeds of foolish living things,
And mirrors fit to be the gifts of kings.

And now before the Sea-born One he stands,
By the sweet veiling smoke made dim and soft,
And while the incense trickles from his hands,
And while the odorous smoke-wreaths hang aloft,
Thus doth he pray to her: "O Thou, who oft
Hast holpen man and maid in their distress,
Despise me not for this my wretchedness!

"O goddess, among us who dwell below,
Kings and great men, great for a little while,
Have pity on the lowly heads that bow,
Nor hate the hearts that love them without guile;
Wilt thou be worse than these, and is thy smile
A vain device of him who set thee here,
An empty dream of some artificer?

"O great one, some men love, and are ashamed;
Some men are weary of the bonds of love;
Yea, and by some men lightly art thou blamed,
That from thy toils their lives they cannot move,
And 'mid the ranks of men their manhood prove.
Alas! O goddess, if thou slayest me
What new immortal can I serve but thee?

"Think then, will it bring honour to thy head
If folk say, 'Everything aside he cast
And to all fame and honour was he dead,
And to his one hope now is dead at last,
Since all unholpen he is gone and past:
Ah, the gods love not man, for certainly,
He to his helper did not cease to cry.'

"Nay, but thou wilt help; they who died before
Not single-hearted as I deem came here,

Therefore unthanked they laid their gifts before
Thy stainless feet, still shivering with their fear,
Lest in their eyes their true thought might appear,
Who sought to be the lords of that fair town,
Dreaded of men and winners of renown.

“O Queen, thou knowest I pray not for this :
O set us down together in some place
Where not a voice can break our heaven of bliss,
Where nought but rocks and I can see her face,
Softening beneath the marvel of thy grace,
Where not a foot our vanished steps can track —
The golden age, the golden age come back !

“O fairest, hear me now who do thy will,
Plead for thy rebel that she be not slain,
But live and love and be thy servant still ;
Ah, give her joy and take away my pain,
And thus two long-enduring servants gain.
An easy thing this is to do for me,
What need of my vain words to weary thee !

“But none the less, this place will I not leave
Until I needs must go my death to meet,
Or at thy hands some happy sign receive
That in great joy we twain may one day greet
Thy presence here and kiss thy silver feet,
Such as we deem thee, fair beyond all words,
Victorious o'er our servants and our lords.”

Then from the altar back a space he drew,
But from the Queen turned not his face away,
But 'gainst a pillar leaned, until the blue
That arched the sky, at ending of the day,
Was turned to ruddy gold and changing grey,
And clear, but low, the nigh-ebbed windless sea
In the still evening murmured ceaselessly.

And there he stood when all the sun was down,
Nor had he moved, when the dim golden light,
Like the far lustre of a godlike town,
Had left the world to seeming hopeless night,
Nor would he move the more when wan moonlight

Streamed through the pillars for a little while,
And lighted up the white Queen's changeless smile.

Nought noted he the shallow-flowing sea
As step by step it set the wrack a-swim,
The yellow torchlight nothing noted he
Wherein with fluttering gown and half-bared limb
The temple damsels sung their midnight hymn;
And nought the doubled stillness of the fane
When they were gone and all was hushed again.

But when the waves had touched the marble base,
And steps the fish swim over twice a-day,
The dawn beheld him sunken in his place
Upon the floor; and sleeping there he lay,
Not heeding aught the little jets of spray
The roughened sea brought nigh, across him cast,
For as one dead all thought from him had passed.

Yet long before the sun had shown his head,
Long ere the varied hangings on the wall
Had gained once more their blue and green and red,
He rose as one some well-known sign doth call
When war upon the city's gates doth fall,
And scarce like one fresh risen out of sleep,
He 'gan again his broken watch to keep.

Then he turned round; not for the sea-gull's cry
That wheeled about the temple in his flight,
Not for the fresh south wind that lovingly
Breathed on the new-born day and dying night,
But some strange hope 'twixt fear and great delight
Drew round his face, now flushed, now pale and wan,
And still constrained his eyes the sea to scan.

Now a faint light lit up the southern sky,
Not sun or moon, for all the world was grey,
But this a bright cloud seemed, that drew anigh,
Lighting the dull waves that beneath it lay
As toward the temple still it took its way,
And still grew greater, till Milanion
Saw nought but dazzling light that round him shone.

But as he staggered with his arms outspread,
 Delicious unnamed odours breathed around,
 For languid happiness he bowed his head,
 And with wet eyes sank down upon the ground,
 Nor wished for aught, nor any dream he found
 To give him reason for that happiness,
 Or make him ask more knowledge of his bliss.

At last his eyes were cleared, and he could see
 Through happy tears the goddess face to face
 With that faint image of Divinity,
 Whose well-wrought smile and dainty changeless grace
 Until that morn so gladdened all the place;
 Then he, unwitting, cried aloud her name
 And covered up his eyes for fear and shame.

But through the stillness he her voice could hear
 Piercing his heart with joy scarce bearable,
 That said, "Milanion, wherefore dost thou fear,
 I am not hard to those who love me well;
 List to what I a second time will tell,
 And thou mayest hear perchance, and live to save
 The cruel maiden from a loveless grave.

"See, by my feet three golden apples lie —
 Such fruit among the heavy roses falls,
 Such fruit my watchful damsels carefully
 Store up within the best loved of my walls,
 Ancient Damascus, where the lover calls
 Above my unseen head, and faint and light
 The rose-leaves flutter round me in the night.

"And note, that these are not alone most fair
 With heavenly gold, but longing strange they bring
 Unto the hearts of men, who will not care
 Beholding these, for any once-loved thing
 Till round the shining sides their fingers cling.
 And thou shalt see thy well-girt swiftfoot maid
 By sight of these amidst her glory stayed.

"For bearing these within a scrip with thee,
 When first she heads thee from the starting-place

Cast down the first one for her eyes to see,
And when she turns aside make on apace,
And if again she heads thee in the race
Spare not the other two to cast aside
If she not long enough behind will bide.

“Farewell, and when has come the happy time
That she Diana’s raiment must unbind
And all the world seems blessed with Saturn’s clime,
And thou with eager arms about her twined
Beholdest first her grey eyes growing kind,
Surely, O trembler, thou shalt scarcely then
Forget the Helper of unhappy men.”

Milanon raised his head at this last word
For now so soft and kind she seemed to be
No longer of her Godhead was he feared;
Too late he looked; for nothing could he see
But the white image glimmering doubtfully
In the departing twilight cold and grey,
And those three apples on the steps that lay.

These then he caught up quivering with delight,
Yet fearful lest it all might be a dream;
And though aweary with the watchful night,
And sleepless nights of longing, still did deem
He could not sleep; but yet the first sunbeam
That smote the fane across the heaving deep
Shone on him laid in calm untroubled sleep.

But little ere the noontide did he rise,
And why he felt so happy scarce could tell
Until the gleaming apples met his eyes.
Then leaving the fair place where this befell
Oft he looked back as one who loved it well,
Then homeward to the haunts of men ’gan wend
To bring all things unto a happy end.

Now has the lingering month at last gone by,
Again are all folk round the running place,
Nor other seems the dismal pageantry
Than heretofore, but that another face
Looks o’er the smooth course ready for the race,

For now, beheld of all, Milanion
Stands on the spot he twice has looked upon.

But yet — what change is this that holds the maid?
Does she indeed see in his glittering eye
More than disdain of the sharp shearing blade,
Some happy hope of help and victory?
The others seemed to say, "We come to die,
Look down upon us for a little while,
That dead, we may bethink us of thy smile."

But he — what look of mastery was this
He cast on her? why were his lips so red?
Why was his face so flushed with happiness?
So looks not one who deems himself but dead,
E'en if to death he bows a willing head;
So rather looks a god well pleased to find
Some earthly damsel fashioned to his mind.

Why must she drop her lids before his gaze,
And even as she casts adown her eyes
Redden to note his eager glance of praise,
And wish that she were clad in other guise?
Why must the memory to her heart arise
Of things unnoticed when they first were heard,
Some lover's song, some answering maiden's word?

What makes these longings, vague, without a name,
And this vain pity never felt before,
This sudden languor, this contempt of fame,
This tender sorrow for the time past o'er,
These doubts that grow each minute more and more?
Why does she tremble as the time grows near,
And weak defeat and woeful victory fear?

Now while she seemed to hear her beating heart,
Above their heads the trumpet blast rang out
And forth they sprang; and she must play her part.
Then flew her white feet, knowing not a doubt,
Though slackening once, she turned her head about,
But then she cried aloud and faster fled
Than e'er before, and all men deemed him dead.

But with no sound he raised aloft his hand,
And thence what seemed a ray of light there flew
And past the maid rolled on along the sand;
Then trembling she her feet together drew
And in her heart a strong desire there grew
To have the toy; some god she thought had given
That gift to her, to make of earth a heaven.

Then from the course with eager steps she ran,
And in her odorous bosom laid the gold.
But when she turned again, the great-limbed man,
Now well ahead she failed not to behold,
And mindful of her glory waxing cold,
Sprang up and followed him in hot pursuit,
Though with one hand she touched the golden fruit.

Note too, the bow that she was wont to bear
She laid aside to grasp the glittering prize,
And o'er her shoulder from the quiver fair
Three arrows fell and lay before her eyes
Unnoticed, as amidst the people's cries
She sprang to head the strong Milanion,
Who now the turning-post had well-nigh won.

But as he set his mighty hand on it
White fingers underneath his own were laid,
And white limbs from his dazzled eyes did flit,
Then he the second fruit cast by the maid,
She ran awhile, and then as one afraid
Wavered and stopped, and turned and made no stay,
Until the globe with its bright fellow lay.

Then, as a troubled glance she cast around
Now far ahead the Argive could she see,
And in her garment's hem one hand she wound
To keep the double prize, and strenuously
Sped o'er the course, and little doubt had she
To win the day, though now but scanty space
Was left betwixt him and the winning place.

Short was the way unto such winged feet,
Quickly she gained upon him till at last
He turned about her eager eyes to meet
And from his hand the third fair apple cast.

She wavered not, but turned and ran so fast
After the prize that should her bliss fulfil,
That in her hand it lay ere it was still.

Nor did she rest, but turned about to win
Once more, an unblest woeful victory —
And yet — and yet — why does her breath begin
To fail her, and her feet drag heavily ?
Why fails she now to see if far or nigh
The goal is ? why do her grey eyes grow dim ?
Why do these tremors run through every limb ?

She spreads her arms abroad some stay to find,
Else must she fall, indeed, and findeth this,
A strong man's arms about her body twined.
Nor may she shudder now to feel his kiss,
So wrapped she is in new unbroken bliss :
Made happy that the foe the prize hath won,
She weeps glad tears for all her glory done.

Shatter the trumpet, hew adown the posts !
Upon the brazen altar break the sword,
And scatter incense to appease the ghosts
Of those who died here by their own award.
Bring forth the image of the mighty Lord,
And her who unseen o'er the runners hung,
And did a deed for ever to be sung.

Here are the gathered folk ; make no delay,
Open King Schoeneus' well-filled treasury,
Bring out the gifts long hid from light of day,
The golden bowls o'erwrought with imagery,
Gold chains, and unguents brought from over sea,
The saffron gown the old Phœnician brought,
Within the temple of the Goddess wrought.

O ye, O damsels, who shall never see
Her, that Love's servant bringeth now to you,
Returning from another victory,
In some cool bower do all that now is due !
Since she in token of her service new
Shall give to Venus offerings rich enow,
Her maiden zone, her arrows, and her bow.

OGIER THE DANE.²³

ARGUMENT.

When Ogier was born, six fay ladies came to the cradle where he lay, and gave him various gifts, as to be brave and happy and the like; but the sixth gave him to be her love when he should have lived long in the world: so Ogier grew up and became the greatest of knights, and at last, after many years, fell into the hands of that fay, and with her, as the story tells, he lives now, though he returned once to the world, as is shown in the process of this tale.

WITHIN some Danish city by the sea,
Whose name, changed now, is all unknown to me,
Great mourning was there one fair summer eve,
Because the angels, bidden to receive
The fair Queen's lovely soul in Paradise,
Had done their bidding, and in royal guise
Her helpless body, once the prize of love,
Unable now for fear or hope to move,
Lay underneath the golden canopy;
And bowed down by unkingly misery
The King sat by it, and not far away,
Within the chamber a fair man-child lay,
His mother's bane, the king that was to be,
Not witting yet of any royalty,
Harmless and loved, although so new to life.

Calm the June evening was, no sign of strife
The clear sky showed; no storm grew round the sun,
Unhappy that his day of bliss was done;
Dumb was the sea, and if the beech-wood stirred,
'Twas with the nestling of the grey-winged bird
Midst its thick leaves; and though the nightingale
Her ancient, hapless sorrow must bewail,
No more of woe there seemed within her song
Than such as doth to lovers' words belong,
Because their love is still unsatisfied.

But to the King, on that sweet eventide,
No earth there seemed, no heaven when earth was gone;
No help, no God! but lonely pain alone;

And he, midst unreal shadows, seemed to sit
Himself the very heart and soul of it.
But round the cradle of the new-born child
The nurses now the weary time beguiled
With stories of the just departed Queen;
And how, amid the heathen folk first seen,
She had been won to love and godliness;
And as they spoke, e'en midst his dull distress,
An eager whisper now and then did smite
Upon the King's ear, of some past delight,
Some once familiar name, and he would raise
His weary head, and on the speaker gaze
Like one about to speak, but soon again
Would drop his head and be alone with pain,
Nor think of these, who, silent in their turn,
Would sit and watch the waxen tapers burn
Amidst the dusk of the quick-gathering night,
Until beneath the high stars' glimmering light,
The fresh earth lay in colourless repose.

So passed the night, and now and then one rose
From out her place to do what might avail
To still the new-born infant's fretful wail;
Or through the softly-opened door there came
Some nurse new waked, who, whispering low the name
Of her whose turn was come, would take her place;
Then toward the King would turn about her face
And to her fellows whisper of the day,
And tell again of her just passed away.

So passed the night, the moon arose and grew,
From off the sea a little west-wind blew,
Rustling the garden-leaves like sudden rain;
And ere the moon began to fall again
The wind grew cold, a change was in the sky,
And in deep silence did the dawn draw nigh:
Then from her place a nurse arose to light
Fresh hallowed lights, for, dying with the night,
The tapers round about the dead Queen were;
But the King raised his head and 'gan to stare
Upon her, as her sweeping gown did glide
About the floor, that in the stillness cried
Beneath her careful feet; and now as she
Had lit the second candle carefully,

And on its silver spike another one
Was setting, through her body did there run
A sudden tremor, and the hand was stayed
That on the dainty painted wax was laid;
Her eyelids fell down, and she seemed to sleep,
And o'er the staring King began to creep
Sweet slumber too; the bitter lines of woe
That drew his weary face did softer grow,
His eyelids dropped, his arms fell to his side;
And moveless in their places did abide
The nursing women, held by some strong spell,
E'en as they were, and utter silence fell
Upon the mournful, glimmering chamber fair.

But now light footsteps coming up the stair,
Smote on the deadly stillness, and the sound
Of silken dresses trailing o'er the ground;
And heavenly odours through the chamber passed,
Unlike the scents that rose and lily cast
Upon the freshness of the dying night;
Then nigher drew the sound of footsteps light
Until the door swung open noiselessly —
A mass of sunlit flowers there seemed to be
Within the doorway; and but pale and wan
The flame showed now that serveth mortal man,
As one by one six seeming ladies passed
Into the room, and o'er its sorrow cast
That thoughtless sense of joy bewildering,
That kisses youthful hearts amidst of spring;
Crowned were they, in such glorious raiment clad,
As yet no merchant of the world has had
Within his coffers; yet those crowns seemed fair
Only because they kissed their odorous hair,
And all that flowery raiment was but blessed
By those fair bodies that its splendour pressed.

Now to the cradle from that glorious band,
A woman passed, and laid a tender hand
Upon the babe, and gently drew aside
The swathings soft that did his body hide;
And, seeing him so fair and great, she smiled,
And stooped, and kissed him, saying, "O noble child,
Have thou a gift from Gloriande this day;
For to the time when life shall pass away
From this dear heart, no fear of death or shame,

No weariness of good shall foul thy name."

So saying, to her sisters she returned ;
And one came forth, upon whose brow there burned
A crown of rubies, and whose heaving breast
With happy rings a golden hauberk pressed ;
She took the babe, and somewhat frowning said,
"This gift I give, that till thy limbs are laid
At rest for ever, to thine honoured life
There never shall be lacking war and strife,
That thou a long-enduring name mayst win,
And by thy deeds, good pardon for thy sin."

With that another, who, unseen, meanwhile
Had drawn anigh, said with a joyous smile,
"And this forgotten gift to thee I give,
That while amidst the turmoil thou dost live,
Still shalt thou win the game, and unto thee
Defeat and shame but idle words shall be."

Then back they turned, and therewithal, the fourth
Said, "Take this gift for what it may be worth
For that is mine to give ; lo, thou shalt be
Gentle of speech, and in all courtesy
The first of men : a little gift this is,
After these promises of fame and bliss."

Then toward the babe the fifth fair woman went ;
Grey-eyed she was, and simple, with eyes bent
Down on the floor ; parted her red lips were,
And o'er her sweet face marvellously fair
Oft would the colour spread full suddenly ;
Clad in a dainty gown and thin was she,
For some green summer of the fay-land dight ;
Tripping she went, and laid her fingers light
Upon the child, and said, "O little one,
As long as thou shalt look upon the sun
Shall women long for thee ; take heed to this
And give them what thou canst of love and bliss."
Then, blushing for her words, therefrom she past,
And by the cradle stood the sixth and last,
The fairest of them all ; awhile she gazed
Down on the child, and then her hand she raised,
And made the one side of her bosom bare ;
"Ogier," she said, "if this be foul or fair
Thou know'st not now, but when thine earthly life
Is drunk out to the dregs, and war and strife

Have yielded thee whatever joy they may,
Thine head upon this bosom shalt thou lay;
And then, despite of knowledge or of God,
Will we be glad upon the flowery sod
Within the happy country where I dwell:
Ogier, my love that is to be, farewell!"

She turned, and even as they came they passed
From out the place, and reached the gate at last
That oped before their feet, and speedily
They gained the edges of the murmuring sea,
And as they stood in silence, gazing there
Out to the west, they vanished into air,
I know not how, nor whereto they returned.

But mixed with twilight in the chamber burned
The flickering candles, and those dreary folk,
Unlike to sleepers, from their trance awoke,
But nought of what had happed meanwhile they knew.
Through the half-opened casements now there blew
A sweet fresh air, that of the flowers and sea
Mingled together, smelt deliciously,
And from the unseen sun the spreading light
Began to make the fair June blossoms bright,
And midst their weary woe uprose the sun,
And thus has Ogier's noble life begun.

Hope is our life, when first our life grows clear;
Hope and delight, scarce crossed by lines of fear;
Yet the day comes when fain we would not hope,
But forasmuch as we with life must cope,
Struggling with this and that, who knoweth why?
Hope will not give us up to certainty,
But still must bide with us: and with this man,
Whose life amid such promises began
Great things she wrought; but now the time has come
When he no more on earth may have his home.

Great things he suffered, great delights he had,
Unto great kings he gave good deeds for bad;
He ruled o'er kingdoms where his name no more
Is had in memory, and on many a shore
He left his sweat and blood to win a name
Passing the bounds of earthly creatures' fame.

A love he won and lost, a well-loved son
Whose little day of promise soon was done:
A tender wife he had, that he must leave
Before his heart her love could well receive;
Those promised gifts, that on his careless head
In those first hours of his fair life were shed
He took unwitting, and unwitting spent,
Nor gave himself to grief and discontent
Because he saw the end a-drawing nigh.

Where is he now? in what land must he die,
To leave an empty name to us on earth?
A tale half true, to cast across our mirth
Some pensive thoughts of life that might have been;
Where is he now, that all this life has seen?

Behold, another eve upon the earth
Than that calm evening of the warrior's birth!
The sun is setting in the west, the sky
Is clear and hard, and no clouds come anigh
The golden orb, but farther off they lie,
Steel-grey and black with edges red as blood,
And underneath them is the weltering flood
Of some huge sea, whose tumbling hills, as they
Turn restless sides about, are black or grey,
Or green, or glittering with the golden flame;
The wind has fallen now, but still the same
The mighty army moves, as if to drown
This lone, bare rock, whose shear scarped sides of brown
Cast off the weight of waves in clouds of spray.

Alas! what ships upon an evil day
Bent over to the wind in this ill sea?
What navy, whose rent bones lie wretchedly
Beneath these cliffs? a mighty one it was,
A fearful storm to bring such things to pass.

This is the loadstone rock; no armament
Of warring nations, in their madness bent
Their course this way; no merchant wittingly
Has steered his keel unto this luckless sea;
Upon no shipman's card its name is writ,
Though worn-out mariners will speak of it
Within the ingle on the winter's night,
When all within is warm and safe and bright,

And the wind howls without: but 'gainst their will
Are some folk driven here, and then all skill
Against this evil rock is vain and nought,
And unto death the shipmen soon are brought;
For then the keel, as by a giant's hand,
Is drawn unto that mockery of a land,
And presently unto its sides doth cleave;
When if they 'scape swift death, yet none may leave
The narrow limits of that barren isle,
And thus are slain by famine in a while,
Mocked, as they say, by night with images
Of noble castles among groves of trees,
By day with sounds of merry minstrelsy.

The sun sinks now below this hopeless sea,
The clouds are gone, and all the sky is bright;
The moon is rising o'er the growing night,
And by its shine may ye behold the bones
Of generations of these luckless ones
Scattered about the rock; but nigh the sea
Sits one alive, who uncomplainingly
Awaits his death. White-haired is he and old,
Arrayed in royal raiment, bright with gold,
But tarnished with the waves and rough salt air;
Huge is he, of a noble face and fair,
As for an ancient man, though toil and eld
Furrow the cheeks that ladies once beheld
With melting hearts — Nay, listen, for he speaks!

“God, Thou hast made me strong! nigh seven weeks
Have passed since from the wreck we haled our store,
And five long days well told, have now passed o'er
Since my last fellow died, with my last bread
Between his teeth, and yet I am not dead.
Yea, but for this I had been strong enow
In some last bloody field my sword to show.
What matter? soon will all be past and done,
Where'er I died I must have died alone:
Yet, Carageu, a good death had it been
Dying, thy face above me to have seen,
And heard my banner flapping in the wind,
Then, though my memory had not left thy mind,
Yet hope and fear would not have vexed thee more
When thou hadst known that everything was o'er;

But now thou waitest, still expecting me,
Whose sail shall never speck thy bright blue sea.

“And thou, Clarice, the merchants thou mayst call,
To tell thee tales within thy pictured hall,
But never shall they tell true tales of me:
Whatever sails the Kentish hills may see
Swept by the flood-tide toward thy well-walled town,
No more on my sails shall they look adown.

“Get thee another leader, Charlemaine,
For thou shalt look to see my shield in vain,
When in the fair fields of the Frankish land,
Thick as the corn they tread, the heathen stand.

“What matter? ye shall learn to live your lives;
Husbands and children, other friends and wives,
Shall wipe the tablets of your memory clean,
And all shall be as I had never been.

“And now, O God, am I alone with Thee;
A little thing indeed it seems to be
To give this life up, since it needs must go
Some time or other; now at last I know
How foolishly men play upon the earth,
When unto them a year of life seems worth
Honour and friends, and these vague hopes and sweet
That like real things my dying heart do greet,
Unreal while living on the earth I trod,
And but myself I knew no other god.
Behold, I thank Thee that Thou sweet’nest thus
This end, that I had thought most piteous,
If of another I had heard it told.”

What man is this, who, weak and worn and old,
Gives up his life within that dreadful isle,
And on the fearful coming death can smile?
Alas! this man, so battered and outworn,
Is none but he, who, on that summer morn,
Received such promises of glorious life:
Ogier the Dane this is, to whom all strife
Was but as wine to stir awhile the blood,
To whom all life, however hard, was good:
This is the man, unmatched of heart and limb,
Ogier the Dane, whose sight has waxed not dim

For all the years that he on earth has dwelt;
Ogier the Dane, that never fear has felt,
Since he knew good from ill; Ogier the Dane,
The heathen's dread, the evil-doer's bane.

Bright had the moon grown as his words were done,
And no more was there memory of the sun
Within the west, and he grew drowsy now,
And somewhat smother was his wrinkled brow
As thought died out beneath the hand of sleep,
And o'er his soul forgetfulness did creep,
Hiding the image of swift-coming death;
Until as peacefully he drew his breath
As on that day, past for a hundred years,
When, midst the nurse's quickly-falling tears,
He fell asleep to his first lullaby.

The night changed as he slept, white clouds and high
Began about the lonely moon to close;
And from the dark west a new wind arose,
And with the sound of heavy-falling waves
Mingled its pipe about the loadstone caves;
But when the twinkling stars were hid away,
And a faint light and broad, like dawn of day,
The moon upon that dreary country shed,
Ogier awoke, and lifting up his head
And smiling, muttered, "Nay, no more again;
Rather some pleasure new, some other pain,
Unthought of both, some other form of strife;"
For he had waked from dreams of his old life,
And through St. Omer's archer-guarded gate
Once more had seemed to pass, and saw the state
Of that triumphant king; and still, though all
Seemed changed, and folk by other names did call
Faces he knew of old, yet none the less
He seemed the same, and, midst that mightiness,
Felt his own power, and grew the more athirst
For coming glory, as of old, when first
He stood before the face of Charlemaine,
A helpless hostage with all life to gain.

But now, awake, his worn face once more sank
Between his hands, and, murmuring not, he drank
The draught of death that must that thirst allay.

But while he sat and waited for the day
A sudden light across the bare rock streamed,
Which at the first he noted not, but deemed
The moon her fleecy veil had broken through;
But ruddier indeed this new light grew
Than were the moon's grey beams, and, therewithal,
Soft far-off music on his ears did fall;
Yet moved he not, but murmured, "This is death,
An easy thing like this to yield my breath,
Awake, yet dreaming, with no sounds of fear,
No dreadful sights to tell me it is near;
Yea, God, I thank Thee!" but with that last word
It seemed to him that he his own name heard
Whispered, as though the wind had borne it past;
With that he gat unto his feet at last,
But still awhile he stood, with sunken head,
And in a low and trembling voice he said,
"Lord, I am ready, whither shall I go?
I pray Thee unto me some token show."
And, as he said this, round about he turned,
And in the east beheld a light that burned
As bright as day; then, though his flesh might fear
The coming change that he believed so near,
Yet did his soul rejoice, for now he thought
Unto the very heaven to be brought:
And though he felt alive, deemed it might be
That he in sleep had died full easily.

Then toward that light did he begin to go,
And still those strains he heard, far off and low,
That grew no louder; still that bright light streamed
Over the rocks, yet nothing brighter seemed,
But like the light of some unseen bright flame
Shone round about, until at last he came
Unto the dreary islet's other shore,
And then the minstrelsy he heard no more,
And softer seemed the strange light unto him;
But yet, or ever it had grown quite dim,
Beneath its waning light could he behold
A mighty palace set about with gold,
Above green meads and groves of summer trees
Far-off across the welter of the seas;
But, as he gazed, it faded from his sight,
And the grey hidden moon's diffused soft light,

Which soothly was but darkness to him now,
His sea-girt island prison did but show.

But o'er the sea he still gazed wistfully,
And said, "Alas! and when will this go by
And leave my soul in peace? must I still dream
Of life that once so dear a thing did seem,
That, when I wake, death may the bitterer be?
Here will I sit until he come to me,
And hide mine eyes and think upon my sin,
That so a little calm I yet may win
Before I stand within the awful place."

Then down he sat and covered up his face,
Yet therewithal his trouble could not hide,
Nor waiting thus for death could he abide,
For, though he knew it not, the yearning pain
Of hope of life had touched his soul again —
If he could live awhile, if he could live!
The mighty being, who once was wont to give
The gift of life to many a trembling man;
Who did his own will since his life began;
Who feared not aught, but strong and great and free
Still cast aside the thought of what might be;
Must all this then be lost, and with no will,
Powerless and blind, must he some fate fulfil,
Nor know what he is doing any more?

Soon he arose and paced along the shore,
And gazed out seaward for the blessed light;
But nought he saw except the old sad sight,
The ceaseless tumbling of the billows grey,
The white upspringing of the spurts of spray
Amidst that mass of timbers, the rent bones
Of the sea-houses of the hapless ones
Once cast like him upon this deadly isle.

He stopped his pacing in a little while,
And clenched his mighty hands, and set his teeth,
And gazing at the ruin underneath,
He swung from off the bare cliff's jagged brow,
And on some slippery ledge he wavered now,
Without a hand-hold, and now stoutly clung
With hands alone, and o'er the welter hung,
Not caring aught if thus his life should end;
But safely amidst all this did he descend

The dreadful cliff, and since no beach was there,
But from the depths the rock rose stark and bare,
Nor crumbled aught beneath the hammering sea,
Upon the wrecks he stood unsteadily.

But now, amid the clamour of the waves,
And washing to-and-fro of beams and staves,
Dizzy with hunger, dreamy with distress,
And all those days of fear and loneliness,
The ocean's tumult seemed the battle's roar,
His heart grew hot, as when in days of yore
He heard the cymbals clash amid the crowd
Of dusky faces; now he shouted loud,
And from crushed beam to beam began to leap,
And yet his footing somehow did he keep
Amidst their tossing, and indeed the sea
Was somewhat sunk upon the island's lee.
So quickly on from wreck to wreck he passed,
And reached the outer line of wrecks at last,
And there a moment stood unsteadily,
Amid the drift of spray that hurried by,
And drew Courtain his sword from out its sheath,
And poised himself to meet the coming death,
Still looking out to sea; but as he gazed,
And once or twice his doubtful feet he raised
To take the final plunge, that heavenly strain
Over the washing waves he heard again,
And from the dimness something bright he saw
Across the waste of waters towards him draw;
And hidden now, now raised aloft, at last
Unto his very feet a boat was cast,
Gilded inside and out, and well arrayed
With cushions soft; far fitter to have weighed
From some sweet garden on the shallow Seine,
Or in a reach of green Thames to have lain,
Than struggle with that huge confused sea;
But Ogier gazed upon it doubtfully
One moment, and then, sheathing Courtain, said:
"What tales are these about the newly dead
The heathen told? what matter, let all pass;
This moment as one dead indeed I was,
And this must be what I have got to do,
I yet perchance may light on something new

Before I die; though yet perchance this keel
Unto the wondrous mass of charmèd steel
Is drawn as others." With that word he leapt
Into the boat, and o'er the cushions crept
From stem to stern, but found no rudder there,
Nor any oars, nor were the cushions fair
Made wet by any dashing of the sea.

Now while he pondered how these things could be
The boat began to move therefrom at last,
But over him a drowsiness was cast,
And as o'er tumbling hills the skiff did pass,
He clean forgot his death and where he was.

At last he woke up to a sunny day,
And, looking round, saw that his shallop lay
Moored at the edge of some fair tideless sea
Unto an overhanging thick-leaved tree,
Where in the green waves did the low bank dip
Its fresh and green grass-covered daisied lip;
But Ogier looking thence no more could see
That sad abode of death and misery,
Nor aught but wide and empty ocean, grey
With gathering haze, for now it neared midday;
Then from the golden cushions did he rise,
And wondering still if this were Paradise
He stepped ashore, but drew Courtain his sword
And muttered therewithal a holy word.

Fair was the place, as though amidst of May,
Nor did the brown birds fear the sunny day,
For with their quivering song the air was sweet;
Thick grew the field-flowers underneath his feet,
And on his head the blossoms down did rain;
Yet mid these fair things, slowly and with pain
He 'gan to go, yea, even when his foot
First touched the flowery sod, to his heart's root
A coldness seemed to strike, and now each limb
Was growing stiff, his eyes waxed bleared and dim,
And all his stored-up memory 'gan to fail,
Nor yet would his once mighty heart avail
For lamentations o'er his changed lot;
Yet urged by some desire, he knew not what,
Along a little path 'twixt hedges sweet,

Drawn sword in hand, he dragged his faltering feet,
For what then seemed to him a weary way,
Whereon his steps he needs must often stay
And lean upon the mighty well-worn sword
That in those hands grown old, for king or lord
Had small respect in glorious days long past.

But still he crept along, and at the last
Came to a gilded wicket, and through this
Entered a garden fit for utmost bliss,
If that might last which needs must soon go by:
There 'gainst a tree he leaned, and with a sigh
He said, "O God, a sinner I have been,
And good it is that I these things have seen
Before I meet what Thou hast set apart
To cleanse the earthly folly from my heart;
But who within this garden now can dwell
Wherein guilt first upon the world befell?"

A little further yet he staggered on,
Till to a fountain-side at last he won,
O'er which two white-thorns their sweet blossoms shed,
There he sank down, and laid his weary head
Beside the mossy roots, and in a while
He slept, and dreamed himself within the isle;
That splashing fount the weary sea did seem,
And in his dream the fair place but a dream;
But when again to feebleness he woke
Upon his ears that heavenly music broke,
Not faint or far as in the isle it was,
But e'en as though the minstrels now did pass
Anigh his resting-place; then fallen in doubt,
E'en as he might, he rose and gazed about,
Leaning against the hawthorn stem with pain;
And yet his straining gaze was but in vain,
Death stole so fast upon him, and no more
Could he behold the blossoms as before,
No more the trees seemed rooted to the ground,
A heavy mist seemed gathering all around,
And in its heart some bright thing seemed to be,
And round his head there breathed deliciously
Sweet odours, and that music never ceased.
But as the weight of Death's strong hand increased

Again he sank adown, and Courtain's noise
Within the scabbard seemed a farewell voice
Sent from the world he loved so well of old,
And all his life was as a story told,
And as he thought thereof he 'gan to smile
E'en as a child asleep, but in a while
It was as though he slept, and sleeping dreamed,
For in his half-closed eyes a glory gleamed,
As though from some sweet face and golden hair,
And on his breast were laid soft hands and fair,
And a sweet voice was ringing in his ears,
Broken as if with flow of joyous tears;

"Ogier, sweet friend, hast thou not tarried long?
Alas! thine hundred years of strife and wrong!"

Then he found voice to say, "Alas! dear Lord,
Too long, too long; and yet one little word
Right many a year ago had brought me here."
Then to his face that face was drawn anear,
He felt his head raised up and gently laid
On some kind knee, again the sweet voice said,
"Nay, Ogier, nay, not yet, not yet dear friend!
Who knoweth when our linked life shall end,
Since thou art come unto mine arms at last,
And all the turmoil of the world is past?
Why do I linger ere I see thy face
As I desired it in that mourning place
So many years ago — so many years,
Thou knewest not thy love and all her fears?"

"Alas!" he said, "what mockery then is this
That thou wilt speak to me of earthly bliss?
No longer can I think upon the earth,
Have I not done with all its grief and mirth?
Yes, I was Ogier once, but if my love
Should come once more my dying heart to move,
Then must she come from 'neath the milk-white walls
Whereon to-day the hawthorn blossom falls
Outside St. Omer's — art thou she? her name,
Which I remembered once mid death and fame,
Is clean forgotten now; but yesterday,
Meseems, our son, upon her bosom lay:
Baldwin the fair — what hast thou done with him
Since Charlot slew him? Ah, mine eyes wax dim;
Woman, forbear! wilt thou not let me die?"

Did I forget thee in the days gone by ?
Then let me die, that we may meet again !”

He tried to move from her, but all in vain,
For life had well-nigh left him, but withal
He felt a kiss upon his forehead fall,
And could not speak ; he felt slim fingers fair
Move to his mighty sword-worn hand, and there
Set on some ring, and still he could not speak,
And once more sleep weighed down his eyelids weak.

But, ah ! what land was this he woke unto ?
What joy was this that filled his heart anew ?
Had he then gained the very Paradise ?
Trembling, he durst not at the first arise,
Although no more he felt the pain of eld,
Nor durst he raise his eyes that now beheld
Beside him the white flowers and blades of grass ;
He durst not speak, lest he some monster was.

But while he lay and hoped, that gentle voice
Once more he heard ; “ Yea, thou mayst well rejoice !
Thou livest still, my sweet, thou livest still,
Apart from every earthly fear and ill ;
Wilt thou not love me, who have wrought thee this,
That I like thee may live in double bliss ? ”

Then Ogier rose up, nowise like to one
Whose span of earthly life is nigh outrun,
But as he might have risen in old days
To see the spears cleave the fresh morning haze ;
But, looking round, he saw no change there was
In the fair place wherethrough he first did pass ;
Though all, grown clear and joyous to his eyes,
Now looked no worse than very Paradise ;
Behind him were the thorns, the fountain fair
Still sent its glittering stream forth into air,
And by its basin a fair woman stood,
And as their eyes met, his renewèd blood
Rushed to his face ; with unused thoughts and sweet
And hurrying hopes, his heart began to beat.

The fairest of all creatures did she seem ;
So fresh and delicate you well might deem

That scarce for eighteen summers had she blessed
The happy, longing world ; yet, for the rest,
Within her glorious eyes such wisdom dwelt
A child before her had the wise man felt ;
And with the pleasure of a thousand years
Her lips were fashioned to move joy or tears
Among the longing folk where she might dwell,
To give at last the kiss unspeakable.

In such wise was she clad as folk may be,
Who, for no shame of their humanity,
For no sad changes of the imperfect year,
Rather for added beauty, raiment wear ;
For, as the heat-foretelling grey-blue haze
Veils the green flowery morn of late May-days,
Her raiment veiled her ; where the bands did meet
That bound the sandals to her dainty feet,
Gems gleamed ; a fresh rose-wreath embraced her head,
And on her breast there lay a ruby red.

So with a supplicating look she turned
To meet the flame that in his own eyes burned,
And held out both her white arms lovingly,
As though to greet him as he drew anigh.
Stammering he said, " Who art thou ? how am I
So cured of all my evils suddenly,
That certainly I felt no mightier, when,
Amid the backward rush of beaten men,
About me drooped the axe-torn Oriflamme ?
Alas ! I fear that in some dream I am."

" Ogier," she said, " draw near, perchance it is
That such a name God gives unto our bliss ;
I know not, but if thou art such an one
As I must deem, all days beneath the sun
That thou hadst had, shall be but dreams indeed
To those that I have given thee at thy need.
For many years ago beside the sea
When thou wert born, I plighted troth with thee :
Come near then, and make mirrors of mine eyes,
That thou mayst see what these my mysteries
Have wrought in thee ; surely but thirty years,
Passed amidst joy, thy new-born body bears,
Nor while thou art with me, and on this shore
Art still full-fed of love, shalt thou seem more.
Nay, love, come nigher, and let me take thine hand,

The hope and fear of many a warring land,
And I will show thee wherein lies the spell,
Whereby this happy change upon thee fell."

Like a shy youth before some royal love,
Close up to that fair woman did he move,
And their hands met; yet to his changed voice
He dared not trust; nay, scarcely could rejoice
E'en when her balmy breath he 'gan to feel,
And felt strange sweetness o'er his spirit steal
As her light raiment, driven by the wind,
Swept round him, and, bewildered and half-blind,
His lips the treasure of her lips did press,
And round him clung her perfect loveliness.

For one sweet moment thus they stood, and then
She drew herself from out his arms again,
And panting, lovelier for her love, did stand
Apart awhile, then took her lover's hand,
And, in a trembling voice, made haste to say, —

"O Ogier, when thou camest here to-day,
I feared indeed, that in my play with fate,
I might have seen thee e'en one day too late,
Before this ring thy finger should embrace;
Behold it, love, and thy keen eyes may trace
Faint figures wrought upon the ruddy gold;
My father dying gave it me, nor told
The manner of its making, but I know
That it can make thee e'en as thou art now
Despite the laws of God — shrink not from me
Because I give an impious gift to thee —
Has not God made me also, who do this?
But I, who longed to share with thee my bliss,
Am of the fays, and live their changeless life,
And, like the gods of old, I see the strife
That moves the world, unmoved if so I will;
For we the fruit, that teaches good and ill,
Have never touched, like you of Adam's race;
And while thou dwellest with me in this place
Thus shalt thou be — ah, and thou deem'st, indeed,
That thou shalt gain thereby no happy meed
Reft of the world's joys? nor canst understand
How thou art come into a happy land? —
Love, in thy world the priests of heaven still sing,

And tell thee of it many a joyous thing;
But think'st thou, bearing the world's joy and pain
Thou couldst live there? nay, nay, but born again
Thou wouldst be happy with the angels' bliss;
And so with us no otherwise it is,
Nor hast thou cast thine old life quite away
Even as yet, though that shall be to-day.

"But for the love and country thou hast won,
Know thou, that thou art come to Avallon,
That is both thine and mine; and as for me,
Morgan le Fay men call me commonly
Within the world, but fairer names than this
I have for thee and me, 'twixt kiss and kiss."

Ah, what was this? and was it all in vain,
That she had brought him here this life to gain?
For, ere her speech was done, like one turned blind
He watched the kisses of the wandering wind
Within her raiment; or as some one sees
The very best of well-wrought images
When he is blind with grief, did he behold
The wandering tresses of her locks of gold
Upon her shoulders; and no more he pressed
The hand that in his own hand lay at rest:
His eyes, grown dull with changing memories,
Could make no answer to her glorious eyes:
Cold waxed his heart, and weary and distraught,
With many a cast-by, hateful, dreary thought,
Unfinished in the old days; and withal
He needs must think of what might chance to fall
In this life new-begun; and good and bad
Tormented him, because as yet he had
A worldly heart within his frame made new,
And to the deeds that he was wont to do
Did his desires still turn. But she a while
Stood gazing at him with a doubtful smile,
And let his hand fall down; and suddenly
Sounded sweet music from some close nearby,
And then she spoke again: "Come, love, with me,
That thou thy new life and delights mayst see."
And gently with that word she led him thence,
And though upon him now there fell a sense
Of dreamy and unreal bewilderment,

As hand in hand through that green place they went,
Yet therewithal a strain of tender love
A little yet his restless heart did move.

So through the whispering trees they came at last
To where a wondrous house a shadow cast
Across the flowers, and o'er the daisied grass
Before it, crowds of lovely folk did pass,
Playing about in carelessness and mirth,
Unshadowed by the doubtful deeds of earth;
And from the midst a band of fair girls came,
With flowers and music, greeting him by name,
And praising him; but ever like a dream
He could not break, did all to Ogier seem,
And he his old world did the more desire,
For in his heart still burned unquenched the fire,
That through the world of old so bright did burn:
Yet was he fain that kindness to return,
And from the depth of his full heart he sighed.

Then toward the house the lovely Queen did guide
His listless steps, and seemed to take no thought
Of knitted brow or wandering eyes distraught,
But still with kind love lighting up her face
She led him through the door of that fair place,
While round about them did the damsels press;
And he was moved by all that loveliness
As one might be, who, lying half asleep
In the May morning, notes the light wind sweep
Over the tulip-beds: no more to him
Were gleaming eyes, red lips, and bodies slim,
Amidst that dream, although the first surprise
Of hurried love wherewith the Queen's sweet eyes
Had smitten him, still in his heart did stir.

And so at last he came, led on by her
Into a hall wherein a fair throne was,
And hand in hand thereto the twain did pass;
And there she bade him sit, and when alone
He took his place upon the double throne,
She cast herself before him on her knees,
Embracing his, and greatly did increase
The shame and love that vexed his troubled heart:
But now a line of girls the crowd did part,

Lovelier than all, and Ogier could behold
One in their midst who bore a crown of gold
Within her slender hands and delicate;
She, drawing nigh, beside the throne did wait
Until the Queen arose and took the crown,
Who then to Ogier's lips did stoop adown
And kissed him, and said, "Ogier, what were worth
Thy miserable days of strife on earth,
That on their ashes still thine eyes are turned?"

Then, as she spoke these words, his changed heart
burned

With sudden memories, and thereto had he
Made answer, but she raised up suddenly
The crown she held and set it on his head,
"Ogier," she cried, "those troublous days are dead;
Thou wert dead with them also, but for me;
Turn unto her who wrought these things for thee!"

Then, as he felt her touch, a mighty wave
Of love swept o'er his soul, as though the grave
Did really hold his body; from his seat
He rose to cast himself before her feet;
But she clung round him, and in close embrace
The twain were locked amidst that thronging place.

Thenceforth new life indeed has Ogier won,
And in the happy land of Avallon
Quick glide the years o'er his unchanging head;
There saw he many men the world thought dead,
Living like him in sweet forgetfulness
Of all the troubles that did once oppress
Their vainly-struggling lives — ah, how can I
Tell of their joy as though I had been nigh?
Suffice it that no fear of death they knew,
That there no talk there was of false or true,
Of right or wrong, for traitors came not there;
That everything was bright and soft and fair,
And yet they wearied not for any change,
Nor unto them did constancy seem strange.
Love knew they, but its pain they never had,
But with each other's joy were they made glad;
Nor were their lives wasted by hidden fire,
Nor knew they of the unfulfilled desire
That turns to ashes all the joys of earth,

Nor knew they yearning love amidst the dearth
Of kind and loving hearts to spend it on,
Nor dreamed of discontent when all was won ;
Nor need they struggle after wealth and fame ;
Still was the calm flow of their lives the same,
And yet, I say, they wearied not of it —
So did the promised days by Ogier flit.

Think that a hundred years have now passed by,
Since ye beheld Ogier lie down to die
Beside the fountain ; think that now ye are
In France, made dangerous with wasting war ;
In Paris, where about each guarded gate,
Gathered in knots, the anxious people wait,
And press around each new-come man to learn
If Harfleur now the pagan wasters burn,
Or if the Rouen folk can keep their chain,
Or Pont de l'Arche unburnt still guards the Seine ?
Or if 't is true that Andelys succour wants ?
That Vernon's folk are fleeing east to Mantes ?
When will they come ? or rather is it true
That a great band the Constable o'erthrew
Upon the marshes of the lower Seine,
And that their long-ships, turning back again,
Caught by the high-raised waters of the bore
Were driven here and there and cast ashore ?

Such questions did they ask, and, as fresh men
Came hurrying in, they asked them o'er again,
And from scared folk, or fools, or ignorant,
Still got new lies, or tidings very scant.

But now amidst these men at last came one,
A little ere the setting of the sun,
With two stout men behind him, armed right well,
Who ever as they rode on, sooth to tell,
With doubtful eyes upon their master stared,
Or looked about like troubled men and scared.
And he they served was noteworthy indeed ;
Of ancient fashions were his arms and weed,
Rich past the wont of men in those sad times ;
His face was bronzed, as though by burning climes,

But lovely as the image of a god
Carved in the days before on earth Christ trod;
But solemn were his eyes, and grey as glass,
And like to ruddy gold his fine hair was;
A mighty man he was, and taller far
Than those who on that day must bear the war
The pagans waged: he by the warders stayed,
Scarce looked on them, but straight their words
obeyed

And showed his pass; then, asked about his name
And from what city of the world he came,
Said, that men called him now the Ancient Knight,
That he was come midst the king's men to fight
From St. Omer; and as he spoke, he gazed
Down on the thronging street as one amazed,
And answered no more to the questioning
Of frightened folk of this or that sad thing;
But, ere he passed on, turned about at last
And on the wondering guard a strange look cast,
And said, "St. Mary! do such men as ye
Fight with the wasters from across the sea?
Then, certes, are ye lost, however good
Your hearts may be; not such were those who stood
Beside the Hammer-bearer years ago."

So said he, and as his fair armour shone
With beauty of a time long passed away,
So with the music of another day
His deep voice thrilled the awe-struck, listening folk.

Yet from the crowd a mocking voice outbroke,
That cried, "Be merry, masters, fear ye nought,
Surely good succour to our side is brought;
For here is Charlemaine come off his tomb
To save his faithful city from its doom."

"Yea," said another, "this is certain news,
Surely ye know how all the carvers use
To carve the dead man's image at the best,
That guards the place where he may lie at rest;
Wherefore this living image looks indeed,
Spite of his ancient tongue and marvellous weed,
To have but thirty summers."

At the name
Of Charlemaine, he turned to whence there came

The mocking voice, and somewhat knit his brow,
And seemed as he would speak, but scarce knew how;
So with a half-sigh soon sank back again
Into his dream, and shook his well-wrought rein,
And silently went on upon his way.

And this was Ogier: on what evil day
Has he then stumbled, that he needs must come,
Midst war and ravage, to the ancient home
Of his desires? did he grow weary then,
And wish to strive once more with foolish men
For worthless things? or is fair Avallon
Sunk in the sea, and all that glory gone?

Nay, thus it happened — One day she came to him
And said, "Ogier, thy name is waxing dim
Upon the world that thou rememberest not;
The heathen men are thick on many a spot
Thine eyes have seen, and which I love therefore;
And God will give His wonted help no more.
Wilt thou, then, help? canst thou have any mind
To give thy banner once more to the wind?
Since greater glory thou shalt win for this
Than erst thou gatheredst ere thou cam'st to bliss:
For men are dwindled both in heart and frame,
Nor holds the fair land any such a name
As thine, when thou wert living midst thy peers;
The world is worser for these hundred years."

From his calm eyes there gleamed a little fire,
And in his voice was something of desire,
To see the land where he was used to be,
As now he answered: "Nay, choose thou for me,
Thou art the wisest; it is more than well
Within this peaceful place with thee to dwell:
Nor ill perchance in that old land to die,
If, dying, I keep not the memory
Of this fair life of ours." "Nay, nay," said she,
"As to thy dying, that shall never be,
Whiles that thou keep'st my ring — and now, behold,
I take from thee thy charmed crown of gold,
And thou wilt be the Ogier that thou wast
Ere on the loadstone rock thy ship was cast:
Yet thou shalt have thy youthful body still,
And I will guard thy life from every ill."

So was it done, and Ogier, armed right well,
Sleeping, was borne away by some strong spell,
And set upon the Flemish coast; and thence
Turned to St. Omer, with a doubtful sense
Of being in some wild dream, the while he knew
That great delight forgotten was his due,
That all which there might hap was of small worth.

So on he went, and sometimes unto mirth
Did his attire move the country-folk,
But oftener when strange speeches from him broke
Concerning men and things for long years dead,
He filled the listeners with great awe and dread;
For in such wild times as these people were
Are men soon moved to wonder and to fear.

Now through the streets of Paris did he ride,
And at a certain hostel did abide
Throughout that night, and ere he went next day
He saw a book that on a table lay,
And opening it 'gan read in lazy mood:
But long before it in that place he stood,
Noting nought else; for it did chronicle
The deeds of men whom once he knew right well,
When they were living in the flesh with him:
Yea, his own deeds he saw, grown strange and dim
Already, and true stories mixed with lies,
Until, with many thronging memories
Of those old days, his heart was so oppressed,
He 'gan to wish that he might lie at rest,
Forgetting all things: for indeed by this
Little remembrance had he of the bliss
That wrapped his soul in peaceful Avallon.

But his changed life he needs must carry on;
For ye shall know the Queen was gathering men
To send unto the good King, who as then
In Rouen lay, beset by many a band
Of those who carried terror through the land,
And still by messengers for help he prayed:
Therefore a mighty muster was being made,
Of weak and strong, and brave and timorous,
Before the Queen anigh her royal house.
So thither on this morn did Ogier turn,

Some certain news about the war to learn;
And when he came at last into the square,
And saw the ancient palace great and fair
Rise up before him as in other days,
And in the merry morn the bright sun's rays
Glittering on gathered helms and moving spears,
He 'gan to feel as in the long-past years,
And his heart stirred within him. Now the Queen
Came from within, right royally beseen,
And took her seat beneath a canopy,
With lords and captains of the war anigh;
And as she came a mighty shout arose,
And round about began the knights to close,
Their oath of fealty to swear anew,
And learn what service they had got to do.
But so it was, that some their shouts must stay
To gaze at Ogier as he took his way
Through the thronged place; and quickly too he gat
Unto the place whereas the Lady sat,
For men gave place unto him, fearing him:
For not alone was he most huge of limb,
And dangerous, but something in his face,
As his calm eyes looked o'er the crowded place,
Struck men with awe; and in the ancient days,
When men might hope alive on gods to gaze,
They would have thought, "The gods yet love our town
And from the heavens have sent a great one down."

Withal unto the throne he came so near,
That he the Queen's sweet measured voice could hear;
And swiftly now within him wrought the change
That first he felt amid those faces strange;
And his heart burned to taste the hurrying life
With such desires, such changing sweetness rife.
And yet, indeed, how should he live alone,
Who in the old past days such friends had known?
Then he began to think of Carraheu,
Of Bellicent the fair, and once more knew
The bitter pain of rent and ended love.
But while with hope and vain regret he strove,
He found none 'twixt him and the Queen's high seat,
And, stepping forth, he knelt before her feet
And took her hand to swear, as was the way
Of doing fealty in that ancient day,

And raised his eyes to her ; as fair was she
As any woman of the world might be,
Full-limbed and tall, dark-haired, from her deep eyes,
The snare of fools, the ruin of the wise,
Love looked unchecked ; and now her dainty hand,
The well-knit holder of the golden wand,
Trembled in his, she cast her eyes adown,
And her sweet brow was knitted to a frown,
As he, the taker of such oaths of yore,
Now unto her all due obedience swore,
Yet gave himself no name ; and now the Queen,
Awed by his voice as other folk had been,
Yet felt a trembling hope within her rise
Too sweet to think of, and with love's surprise
Her cheek grew pale ; she said, "Thy style and
name

Thou tellest not, nor what land of thy fame
Is glad ; for, certes, some land must be glad,
That in its bounds her house thy mother had."

"Lady," he said, "from what far land I come
I well might tell thee, but another home
Have I long dwelt in, and its name have I
Forgotten now, forgotten utterly
Who were my fellows, and what deeds they did ;
Therefore, indeed, shall my first name be hid
And my first country ; call me on this day
The Ancient Knight, and let me go my way."
He rose withal, for her fingers fair
Had drawn aback, and on him 'gan to stare
As one afeard ; for something terrible
Was in his speech, and that she knew right well,
Who 'gan to love him, and to fear that she,
Shut out by some strange deadly mystery,
Should never gain from him an equal love ;
Yet, as from her high seat he 'gan to move,
She said, "O Ancient Knight, come presently,
When we have done this muster, unto me,
And thou shalt have thy charge and due command
For freeing from our foes this wretched land !"

Then Ogier made his reverence and went,
And somewhat could perceive of her intent ;
For in his heart life grew, and love with life
Grew, and therewith, 'twixt love and fame, was strife.

But, as he slowly gat him from the square,
Gazing at all the people gathered there,
A squire of the Queen's behind him came,
And breathless, called him by his new-coined name,
And bade him turn, because the Queen now bade,
Since by the muster long she might be stayed,
That to the palace he should bring him straight,
Midst sport and play her coming back to wait;
Then Ogier turned, nought loath, and with him went,
And to a postern-gate his steps he bent,
That Ogier knew right well in days of old;
Worn was it now, and the bright hues and gold
Upon the shields above, with lapse of days,
Were faded much: but now did Ogier gaze
Upon the garden where he walked of yore,
Holding the hands that he should see no more;
For all was changed except the palace fair,
That Charlemaine's own eyes had seen built there
Ere Ogier knew him; there the squire did lead
The Ancient Knight, who still took little heed
Of all the things that by the way he said,
For all his thoughts were on the days long dead.

There in the painted hall he sat again,
And 'neath the pictured eyes of Charlemaine
He ate and drank, and felt it like a dream;
And midst his growing longings yet might deem
That he from sleep should wake up presently
In some fair city on the Syrian sea,
Or on the brown rocks of the loadstone isle.
But fain to be alone, within a while
He gat him to the garden, and there passed
By wondering squires and damsels, till at last,
Far from the merry folk who needs must play,
If on the world were coming its last day,
He sat him down; and through his mind there ran
Faint thoughts of that day, when, outworn and wan,
He lay down by the fountain-side to die.
But when he strove to gain clear memory
Of what had happed since on the isle he lay
Waiting for death, a hopeless castaway,
Thought, failing him, would rather bring again
His life among the peers of Charlemaine,
And vex his soul with hapless memories;

Until at last, worn out by thought of these,
And hopeless striving to find what was true,
And pondering on the deeds he had to do
Ere he returned, whereto he could not tell,
Sweet sleep upon his wearied spirit fell.
And on the afternoon of that fair day,
Forgetting all, beneath the trees he lay.

Meanwhile the Queen, affairs of state being done,
Went through the gardens with one dame alone
Seeking for Ogier, whom at last she found
Laid sleeping on the daisy-sprinkled ground
Dreaming, I know not what, of other days.
Then on him for a while the Queen did gaze,
Drawing sweet poison from the lovely sight,
Then to her fellow turned, "The Ancient Knight —
What means he by this word of his?" she said;
"He were well mated with some lovely maid
Just pondering on the late-heard name of love."

"Softly, my lady, he begins to move,"
Her fellow said, a woman old and grey;
"Look now, his arms are of another day;
None know him or his deeds; thy squire just said
He asked about the state of men long dead;
I fear what he may be; look, seest thou not
That ring that on one finger he has got,
Where figures strange upon the gold are wrought:
God grant that he from hell has not been brought
For our confusion, in this doleful war,
Who surely in enough of trouble are
Without such help;" then the Queen turned aside
Awhile, her drawn and troubled face to hide,
For lurking dread this speech within her stirred;
But yet she said, "Thou sayest a foolish word,
This man is come against our enemies
To fight for us." Then down upon her knees
Fell the old woman by the sleeping knight,
And from his hand she drew with fingers light
The wondrous ring, and scarce again could rise
Ere 'neath the trembling Queen's bewildered eyes
The change began; his golden hair turned white,
His smooth cheek wrinkled, and his breathing light
Was turned to troublous struggling for his breath,

And on his shrunk lips lay the hand of death;
And, scarce less pale than he, the trembling Queen
Stood thinking on the beauty she had seen
And longed for but a little while ago,
Yet with her terror still her love did grow,
And she began to weep as though she saw
Her beauty e'en to such an ending draw.
And 'neath her tears waking he oped his eyes,
And strove to speak, but nought but gasping sighs
His lips could utter; then he tried to reach
His hand to them, as though he would beseech
The gift of what was his: but all the while
The crone gazed on them with an evil smile,
Then holding toward the Queen that wondrous ring,
She said, "Why weep'st thou? having this fair thing,
Thou, losing nought the beauty that thou hast,
Mayst watch the vainly struggling world go past,
Thyself unchanged." The Queen put forth her hand
And took the ring, and there awhile did stand
And strove to think of it, but still in her
Such all-absorbing longings love did stir,
So young she was, of death she could not think,
Or what a cup eld gives to man to drink;
Yet on her finger had she set the ring
When now the life that hitherto did cling
To Ogier's heart seemed fading quite away,
And scarcely breathing, with shut eyes he lay.
Then, kneeling down, she murmured piteously,
"Ah, wilt thou love me if I give it thee,
And thou grow'st young again? what should I do
If with the eyes thou thus shalt gain anew
Thou shouldst look scorn on me?" But with that word
The hedge behind her, by the west wind stirred,
Cast fear into her heart of some one nigh,
And therewith on his finger hastily
She set the ring, then rose and stood apart
A little way, and in her doubtful heart
With love and fear was mixed desire of life.

But standing so, a look with great scorn rife
The elder woman, turning, cast on her,
Pointing to Ogier, who began to stir;
She looked, and all she erst saw now did seem
To have been nothing but a hideous dream,

As fair and young he rose from off the ground
And cast a dazed and puzzled look around,
Like one just waked from sleep in some strange place;
But soon his grave eyes rested on her face,
And turned yet graver seeing her so pale,
And that her eyes were pregnant with some tale
Of love and fear; she 'neath his eyes the while
Forced her pale lips to semblance of a smile,
And said, "O Ancient Knight, thou sleepest then?
While through this poor land range the heathen men,
Unmet of any but my King and Lord:
Nay, let us see the deeds of thine old sword."

"Queen," said he, "bid me then unto this work,
And certes I behind no wall would lurk,
Nor send for succour, while a scanty folk
Still followed after me to break the yoke:
I pray thee grace for sleeping, and were fain
That I might rather never sleep again
Than have such wretched dreams as I e'en now
Have waked from."

Lovelier she seemed to grow
Unto him as he spoke; fresh colour came
Into her face, as though for some sweet shame,
While she with tearful eyes beheld him so,
That somewhat even must his burnt cheek glow,
His heart beat faster. But again she said,
"Nay, will dreams burden such a mighty head?
Then may I too have pardon for a dream;
Last night in sleep I saw thee, who didst seem
To be the King of France; and thou and I
Were sitting at some great festivity
Within the many-peopled gold-hung place."

The blush of shame was gone, as on his face
She gazed, and saw him read her meaning clear
And knew that no cold words she had to fear,
But rather that for softer speech he yearned.
Therefore, with love alone her smooth cheek burned;
Her parted lips were hungry for his kiss,
She trembled at the near approaching bliss;

Nathless, she checked her love a little while,
Because she felt the old dame's curious smile
Upon her, and she said, "O Ancient Knight,
If I then read my last night's dream aright,

Thou art come here our very help to be,
Perchance to give my husband back to me;
Come then, if thou this land art fain to save,
And show the wisdom thou must surely have
Unto my council; I will give thee then
What charge I may among my valiant men;
And certes thou wilt do so well herein,
That, ere long, something greater shalt thou win:
Come, then, deliverer of my throne and land,
And let me touch for once thy mighty hand
With these weak fingers."

As she spoke, she met
His eager hand, and all things did forget
But for one moment; for too wise were they
To cast the coming years of joy away;
Then with her other hand her gown she raised
And led him thence, and o'er her shoulder gazed
At her old follower with a doubtful smile,
As though to say, "Be wise, I know thy guile!"

But slowly she behind the lovers walked,
Muttering, "So be it! thou shalt not be balked
Of thy desire; be merry! I am wise,
Nor will I rob thee of thy Paradise
For any other than myself; and thou
Mayst even happen to have had enow
Of this new love, before I get the ring,
And I may work for thee no evil thing."

Now ye shall know that the old chronicle,
Wherein I read all this, doth duly tell
Of all the gallant deeds that Ogier did,
There may ye read them; nor let me be chid
If I therefore say little of these things,
Because the thought of Avallon still clings
Unto my heart, and scarcely can I bear
To think of that long, dragging, useless year
Through which, with dulled and glimmering, memory,
Ogier was grown content to live and die
Like other men; but this I have to say,
That in the council chamber on that day
The Old Knight showed his wisdom well enow,
While fainter still with love the Queen did grow
Hearing his words, beholding his grey eyes

Flashing with fire of warlike memories ;
 Yea, at the last he seemed so wise indeed
 That she could give him now the charge, to lead
 One wing of the great army that set out
 From Paris' gates, midst many a wavering shout,
 Midst trembling prayers, and unchecked wails and tears,
 And slender hopes and unresisted fears.

Now ere he went, upon his bed he lay,
 Newly awakened at the dawn of day,
 Gathering perplexèd thoughts of many a thing,
 When, midst the carol that the birds did sing
 Unto the coming of the hopeful sun,
 He heard a sudden lovesome song begun
 'Twixt two young voices in the garden green,
 That seemed indeed the farewell of the Queen.

SONG.

HÆC.

*In the white-flowered hawthorn brake,
 Love, be merry for my sake ;
 Twine the blossoms in my hair,
 Kiss me where I am most fair —
 Kiss me, love ! for who knoweth
 What thing cometh after death ?*

ILLE.

*Nay, the garlanded gold hair
 Hides thee where thou art most fair ;
 Hides the rose-tinged hills of snow —
 Ah, sweet love, I have thee now !
 Kiss me, love ! for who knoweth
 What thing cometh after death ?*

HÆC.

*Shall we weep for a dead day,
 Or set Sorrow in our way ?
 Hidden by my golden hair,
 Wilt thou weep that sweet days wear ?
 Kiss me, love ! for who knoweth
 What thing cometh after death ?*

ILLE.

*Weep, O Love, the days that flit,
Now, while I can feel thy breath;
Then may I remember it
Sad and old, and near my death.
Kiss me, love! for who knoweth
What thing cometh after death!*

Soothed by the pleasure that the music brought
And sweet desire, and vague and dreamy thought
Of happiness it seemed to promise him,
He lay and listened till his eyes grew dim,
And o'er him 'gan forgetfulness to creep
Till in the growing light he lay asleep,
Nor woke until the clanging trumpet-blast
Had summoned him all thought away to cast:
Yet one more joy of love indeed he had
Ere with the battle's noise he was made glad;
For, as on that May morning forth they rode
And passed before the Queen's most fair abode,
There at a window was she waiting them
In fair attire with gold in every hem,
And as the Ancient Knight beneath her passed
A wreath of flowering white-thorn down she cast,
And looked farewell to him, and forth he set
Thinking of all the pleasure he should get
From love and war, forgetting Avallon
And all that lovely life so lightly won;
Yea, now indeed the earthly life o'erpast
Ere on the loadstone rock his ship was cast
Was waxing dim, nor yet at all he learned
To 'scape the fire that erst his heart had burned.
And he forgot his deeds, forgot his fame,
Forgot the letters of his ancient name
As one waked fully shall forget a dream,
That once to him a wondrous tale did seem.

Now I, though writing here no chronicle
E'en as I said, must nathless shortly tell
That, ere the army Rouen's gates could gain
By a broad arrow had the King been slain,

And helpless now the wretched country lay
Beneath the yoke, until the glorious day
When Ogier fell at last upon the foe,
And scattered them as helplessly as though
They had been beaten men without a name:
So when to Paris town once more he came
Few folk the memory of the King did keep
Within their hearts, and if the folk did weep
At his returning, 'twas for joy indeed
That such a man had risen at their need
To work for them so great deliverance,
And loud they called on him for King of France.

But if the Queen's heart were the more a-flame
For all that she had heard of his great fame,
I know not; rather with some hidden dread
Of coming fate, she heard her lord was dead,
And her false dream seemed coming true at last,
For the clear sky of love seemed overcast
With clouds of God's great judgments, and the fear
Of hate and final parting drawing near.

So now when he before her throne did stand
Amidst the throng as saviour of the land,
And she her eyes to his kind eyes did raise,
And there before all her own love must praise;
Then did she fall a-weeping, and folk said,
"See, how she sorrows for the newly dead!
Amidst our joy she needs must think of him;
Let be, full surely shall her grief wax dim
And she shall wed again."

So passed the year,
While Ogier set himself the land to clear
Of broken remnants of the heathen men,
And at the last, when May-time came again,
Must he be crowned King of the twice-saved land,
And at the altar take the fair Queen's hand
And wed her for his own. And now by this
Had he forgotten clean the woe and bliss
Of his old life, and still was he made glad
As other men; and hopes and fears he had
As others, and bethought him not at all
Of what strange days upon him yet should fall
When he should live and these again be dead.

Now drew the time round when he should be wed,
And in his palace on his bed he lay
Upon the dawning of the very day :
"Twixt sleep and waking was he, and could hear
E'en at that hour, through the bright morn and clear,
The hammering of the folk who toiled to make
Some well-wrought stages for the pageant's sake,
Though hardly yet the sparrows had begun
To twitter o'er the coming of the sun,
Nor through the palace did a creature move.

There in the sweet entanglement of love
Midst languid thoughts of greater bliss he lay,
Remembering no more of that other day
Than the hot noon remembereth of the night,
Than summer thinketh of the winter white.

In that sweet hour he heard a voice that cried,
"Ogier, Ogier!" then, opening his eyes wide,
And rising on his elbow, gazed around,
And strange to him and empty was the sound
Of his own name ; "Whom callest thou?" he said
"For I, the man who lie upon this bed,
Am Charles of France, and shall be King to-day,
But in a year that now is passed away
The Ancient Knight they called me: who is this,
Thou callest Ogier, then, what deeds are his?
And who art thou?" But at that word a sigh,
As of one grieved, came from some place anigh
His bed-side, and a soft voice spake again,
"This Ogier once was great amongst great men;
To Italy a helpless hostage led;
He saved the King when the false Lombard fled,
Bore forth the Oriflamme and gained the day;
Charlot he brought back, whom men led away,
And fought a day-long fight with Caraheu.
The ravager of Rome his right hand slew;
Nor did he fear the might of Charlemaine,
Who for a dreary year beset in vain
His lonely castle; yet at last caught then,
And shut in hold, needs must he come again
To give an unhop'd great deliverance
Unto the burdened helpless land of France:
Denmark he gained thereafter, and he wore
The crown of England drawn from trouble sore;

At Tyre then he reigned ; and Babylon
With mighty deeds he from the foemen won ;
And when scarce aught could give him greater fame,
He left the world still thinking on his name.

“These things did Ogier, and these things didst thou,
Nor will I call thee by a new name now
Since I have spoken words of love to thee —
Ogier, Ogier, dost thou remember me,
E’en if thou hast no thought of that past time
Before thou camest to our happy clime ?”

As this was said, his mazed eyes saw indeed
A lovely woman clad in dainty weed
Beside his bed, and many a thought was stirred
Within his heart by that last plaintive word,
Though nought he said, but waited what should come.
“Love,” said she, “I am here to bring thee home ;
Well hast thou done all that thou cam’st to do,
And if thou bidest here, for something new
Will folk begin to cry, and all thy fame
Shall then avail thee but for greater blame ;
Thy love shall cease to love thee, and the earth
Thou lovest now shall be of little worth
While still thou keepest life, abhorring it.
Behold, in men’s lives that so quickly flit
Thus is it ; how then shall it be with thee,
Who some faint image of eternity
Hast gained through me ? — alas, thou heedest not !
On all these changing things thine heart is hot —
Take then this gift that I have brought from far,
And then may’st thou remember what we are ;
The lover and the loved from long ago.”

He trembled, and more memory seemed to grow
Within his heart as he beheld her stand,
Holding a glittering crown in her right hand :
“Ogier,” she said, “arise and do on thee
The emblems of thy worldly sovereignty,
For we must pass o’er many a sea this morn.”

He rose, and in the glittering tunic worn
By Charlemaine he clad himself, and took
The ivory hand, that Charlemaine once shook
Over the people’s heads in days of old ;
Then on his feet he set the shoes of gold,

And o'er his shoulders threw the mantle fair,
And set the gold crown on his golden hair :
Then on the royal chair he sat him down,
As though he deemed the elders of the town
Should come to audience; and in all he seemed
To do these things e'en as a man who dreamed.

And now adown the Seine the golden sun
Shone out, as toward him drew that lovely one
And took from off his head the royal crown,
And, smiling, on the pillow laid it down
And said, "Lie there, O crown of Charlemaine,
Worn by a mighty man, and worn in vain,
Because he died, and all the things he did
Were changed before his face by earth was hid;
A better crown I have for my love's head,
Whereby he yet shall live, when all are dead
His hand has helped." Then on his head she set
The wondrous crown, and said, "Forget, forget!
Forget these weary things, for thou hast much
Of happiness to think of."

At that touch
He rose, a happy light gleamed in his eyes;
And smitten by the rush of memories,
He stammered out, "O love! how came we here?
What do we in this land of Death and Fear?
Have I not been from thee a weary while?
Let us return — I dreamed about the isle;
I dreamed of other years of strife and pain,
Of new years full of struggles long and vain."

She took him by the hand and said, "Come, love,
I am not changed;" and therewith did they move
Unto the door, and through the sleeping place
Swiftly they went, and still was Ogier's face
Turned on her beauty, and no thought was his
Except the dear returning of his bliss.

But at the threshold of the palace-gate
That opened to them, she awhile did wait,
And turned her eyes unto the rippling Seine
And said, "O love, behold it once again!"
He turned, and gazed upon the city grey
Smit by the gold of that sweet morn of May;
He heard faint noises as of wakening folk

As on their heads his day of glory broke;
He heard the changing rush of the swift stream
Against the bridge-piers. All was grown a dream.
His work was over, his reward was come,
Why should he loiter longer from his home?

A little while she watched him silently,
Then beckoned him to follow with a sigh,
And, raising up the raiment from her feet,
Across the threshold stepped into the street;
One moment on the twain the low sun shone,
And then the place was void, and they were gone,
How I know not; but this I know indeed,
That in whatso great trouble or sore need
The land of France since that fair day has been,
No more the sword of Ogier has she seen.

THE FOSTERING OF ASLAUG.²⁴

ARGUMENT.

Aslaug, the daughter of Sigurd who slew the dragon, and of Brynhild whom he loved, lost all her friends and kin, and was nourished amid great misery; yet in the end her fortune, her glory, and her beauty prevailed, and she came to mighty estate.

A FAIR tale might I tell to you
Of Sigurd, who the dragon slew
Upon the murder-wasted heath,
And how love led him unto death,
Through strange wild ways of joy and pain;
Then such a story should ye gain,
If I could tell it all aright,
As well might win you some delight
From out the woefullest of days;
But now have I no heart to raise
That mighty sorrow laid asleep,
That love so sweet, so strong and deep,
That as ye hear the wonder told
In those few strenuous words of old,
The whole world seems to rend apart

When heart is torn away from heart.
But the world lives still, and to-day
The green Rhine wendeth on its way
Over the unseen golden curse
That drew its lords to worse and worse,
Till that last dawn in Atli's hall,
When the red flame flared over all,
Lighting the leaden, sunless sea.

Yet so much told of this must be,
That Sigurd, while his youth was bright
And unstained, midst the first delight
Of Brynhild's love — that him did gain
All joy, all woe, and very bane —
Begot on her a woman-child.
In hope she bore the maid, and smiled
When of its father's face she thought;
But when sad time the change had brought,
And she to Gunnar's house must go,
She, thinking how she might bestow
The memory of that lovely eve,
That morn o'er-sweet, the child did leave
With Heimir, her old foster-sire,
A mighty lord; then, with the fire
Of her old love still smouldering,
And brooding over many a thing,
She went unto her life and death.
Nought, as I said, the story saith
Of all the wrong and love that led
Her feet astray: together dead
They lie now on their funeral pile,
And now the little one doth smile
Upon the glittering war-array
Of the men come the sooth to say
To Heimir of that bitter end.

Silent he stared till these did wend
Into the hall to fire and board,
Then by the porch without a word
Long time he sat: then he arose
And drew his sword, and hard and close
Gazed on the thin-worn edge, and said:
"Smooth cheeks, sweet hands, and art thou dead?"

O me thy glory ! Woe is me !
I thought once more thine eyes to see —
Had I been young three years ago,
When thou a maiden burd-alone,
Hadst eighteen summers !”

As he spake,
He gat him swiftly to the brake
Of thorn-trees nigh his house : and some,
When calm once more he sat at home,
Deemed he had wept : but no word more
He spake thereof.

A few days wore,
And now alone he oft would be
Within his smithy ; heedfully
He guarded it, that none came in ;
Nor marvelled men ; “ For he doth win
Some work of craftsmanship,” said they,
“ And such before on many a day
Hath been his wont.”

So it went on
That a long while he wrought alone ;
But on the tenth day bore in there
Aslaug, the little maiden fair,
Three winters old ; and then the thing
A little set folk marvelling ;
Yet none the less in nought durst they
To watch him. So to end of day
Time drew, and still unto the hall
He came not, and a dread ’gan fall
Upon his household, lest some ill
The quiet of their lives should kill ;
And so it fell that the next morn
They found them of their lord forlorn,
And Aslaug might they see no more ;
Wide open was the smithy door,
The forge a-cold, and hammering tools
Lay on the floor, with woodwright’s rules,
And chips and shavings of hard wood.
Moreover, when they deemed it good
To seek for him, nought might they do,
The tale says, for so dark it grew
Over all ways, that no man might
Know the green meads from water white.

So back they wended sorrowfully,
And still most like it seemed to be,
That Odin had called Heimir home ;
And nothing strange it seemed to some
That with him the sweet youngling was,
Since Brynhild's love might bring to pass
E'en mightier things than this, they said ;
And sure the little gold-curled head,
The pledge of all her earthly weal,
In Freyia's house she longed to feel.

Further the way was than they deemed
Unto that rest whereof they dreamed
Both to the greybeard and the child ;
For now by trodden way and wild
Goes Heimir long : wide-faced is he,
Thin-cheeked, hook-nosed, e'en as might be
An ancient erne ; his hair falls down
From 'neath a wide slouched hat of brown,
And mingles white with his white beard ;
A broad brown brand, most men have feared,
Hangs by his side, and at his back
Is slung a huge harp, that doth lack
All fairness certes, and so great
It is, that few might bear its weight ;
Yea, Heimir even, somewhat slow
Beneath its burden walketh now,
And looketh round, and stayeth soon.

On a calm sunny afternoon,
Within a cleared space of a wood,
At last the huge old warrior stood
And peered about him doubtfully ;
Who, when nought living he might see,
But mid the beech-boughs high aloft
A blue-winged jay, and squirrel soft,
And in the grass a watchful hare,
Unslung his harp and knelt down there
Beside it, and a little while
Handled the hollow with a smile
Of cunning, and behold, the thing
Opened, as by some secret spring,
And there within the hollow lay,

Clad in gold-fringed well-wrought array,
Aslaug, the golden-headed child,
Asleep and rosy ; but she smiled
As Heimir's brown hand drew a-near,
And woke up free from any fear,
And stretched her hands out towards his face.

He sat him down in the green place,
With kind arms round the little one,
Till, fully waked now, to the sun
She turned, and babbling, 'gainst his breast
Her dimpled struggling hands she pressed :
His old lips touched those eyes of hers,
That Sigurd's hope and Brynhild's tears
Made sad e'en in her life's first spring ;
Then sweet her chuckling laugh did ring,
As down amid the flowery grass
He set her, and beheld her pass
From flower to flower in utter glee ;
Therewith he reached out thoughtfully,
And cast his arms around the harp,
That at the first most strange and sharp
Rang through the still day, and the child
Stopped, startled by that music wild :
But then a change came o'er the strings,
As, tinkling sweet, of merry things
They seemed to tell, and to and fro
Danced Aslaug, till the tune did grow
Fuller and stronger, sweeter still,
And all the woodland place did fill
With sound, not merry now nor sad,
But sweet, heart-raising, as it had
The gathered voice of that fair day
Amidst its measured strains ; her play
Amid the flowers grew slower now,
And sadder did the music grow,
And yet still sweeter : and with that,
Nigher to where the old man sat
Aslaug 'gan move, until at last
All sound from the strained strings there passed
As into each other's eyes they gazed ;
Then, sighing, the young thing he raised,
And set her softly on his knee,
And laid her round cheek pitifully

Unto his own, and said :

“Indeed,
Of such as I shalt thou have need,
As swift the troubled days wear by,
And yet I know full certainly
My life on earth shall not be long :
And those who think to better wrong
By working wrong, shall seek thee wide
To slay thee ; yea, belike they ride
E’en now unto my once-loved home.
Well, to a void place shall they come,
And I for thee thus much have wrought —
For thee and Brynhild — yea, and nought
I deem it still to turn my face
Each morn unto some unknown place
Like a poor churl — for, ah ! who knows
Upon what wandering wind that blows
Drives Brynhild’s spirit through the air ;
And now by such road may I fare
That we may meet ere many days.”

Again the youngling did he raise
Unto his face, for to the earth
Had she slipped down ; her babbling mirth
Had mingled with his low deep speech ;
But now, as she her hand did reach
Unto his beard, nor stinted more
Her babble, did a change come o’er
His face ; for through the windless day
Afar a mighty horn did bray ;
Then from beneath his cloak he drew
A golden phial, and set it to
Her ruddy lips in haste, and she
Gazed at him awhile fearfully,
As though she knew he was afraid ;
But silently the child he laid
In the harp’s hollow place, for now
Drowsy and drooping did she grow
’Neath the strong potion ; hastily
He shut the harp, and raised it high
Upon his shoulder, set his sword
Ready to hand, and with no word
Stalked off along the forest glade ;

But muttered presently :

“Afraid
Is a strange word for me to say ;
But all is changed in a short day,
And full of death the world seems grown.
Mayhap I shall be left alone
When all are dead beside, to dream
Of happy life that once did seem
So stirring 'midst the folk I loved.
Ah ! is there nought that may be moved
By strong desire ? yea, nought that rules
The very gods who thrust earth's fools,
This way and that as foolishly,
For aught I know thereof, as I
Deal with the chess when I am drunk ? ”

His head upon his breast was sunk
For a long space, and then again
He spake : “ My life is on the wane ;
Somewhat of this I yet may learn
Ere long ; yet I am fain to earn
My rest by reaching Atli's land ;
For surely 'neath his mighty hand
Safe from the Niblungs shall she be,
Safe from the forge of misery,
Grimhild the Wise-wife.”

As a goad
That name was to him ; on he strode
Still swifter, silent. But day wore
As fast between the tree-stems hoar
He went his ways ; belike it was
That he scarce knew if he did pass
O'er rough or smooth, by dark or light,
Until at last the very night
Had closed round him as thinner grew
The wood that he was hurrying through ;
And as he gained a grey hill's brow
He felt the sea-breeze meet him now,
And heard the low surf's measured beat
Upon the beach. He stayed his feet,
And through the dusky gathering dark
Peered round and saw what seemed a spark
Along the hill's ridge ; thitherward

He turned, still warily on guard,
Until he came unto the door
Of some stead, lone belike and poor :
There knocking, was he bidden in,
And heedfully he raised the pin,
And entering stood with blinking gaze
Before a fire's unsteady blaze.

There sat a woman all alone
Whom some ten years would make a crone,
Yet would they little worsen her ;
Her face was sorely pinched with care,
Sour and thin-lipped she was ; of hue
E'en like a duck's foot ; whitish blue
Her eyes were, seeming as they kept
Wide open even when she slept.

She rose up, and was no less great
Than a tall man, a thing of weight
Was the gaunt hand that held a torch
As Heimir, midmost of the porch,
Fixed his deep grey and solemn eyes
Upon that wretched wife's surprise.

"Well," said she, "what may be your will ?
Little we have your sack to fill,
If on thieves' errand ye are come ;
But since the goodman is from home
I know of none shall say you nay
If ye have will to bear away
The goodwife."

As on a burned house
Grown cold, the moon shines dolorous
From out the rainy lift, so now
A laugh must crease her lip and brow.

"I am no thief, goodwife," he said,
"But ask wherein to lay my head
To-night."

"Well, goodman, sit, " said she :
"Thine ugly box of minstrelsy
With thine attire befits not ill ;
And both belike may match thy skill."

So by the fire he sat him down,
And she too sat, and coarse and brown
The thread was that her rock gave forth
As there she spun ; of little worth
Was all the gear that hall did hold.

Now Heimir new-come from the cold
Had set his harp down by his side,
And, turning his grey eyes and wide
Away from hers, slouched down his hat
Yet farther o'er his brows, and sat
With hands outstretched unto the flame.
But had he noted how there came
A twinkle into her dead eyes,
He had been minded to arise,
Methinks ; for better company
The wild-wood wolf had been than she
Because, from out the hodden grey
That was the great man's poor array,
Once and again could she behold
How that the gleam of ruddy gold
Came forth : so therewith she arose,
And, wandering round the hall, drew close
Unto the great harp, and could see
Some fringe of golden bravery
Hanging therefrom. — And the man too,
In spite of patch and clouted shoe,
And unadorned sword, seemed indeed
Scarce less than a great king in need,
So wholly noble was his mien.

So, with these things thus thought and seen,
Within her mind grew fell intent
As to and fro the hall she went,
And from the ark at last did take
Meal forth for porridge and for cake,
And to the fire she turned, and 'gan
To look still closer on the man
As with the girdle and the pot
She busied her, and doubted not
That on his arm a gold ring was ;
For presently, as she did pass,
Somewhat she brushed the cloak from him,
And saw the gold gleam nowise dim.
Then sure, if man might shape his fate,

Her greed impatient and dull hate
Within her eyes he might have seen,
And so this tale have never been.
But nought he heeded ; far away
His thoughts were.

Therewith did she lay
The meal upon the board, and said,
" Meseems ye would be well apaid
Of meat and drink, and it is here,
Fair lord — though somewhat sorry cheer ;
Fall to now."

Whining, with a grin
She watched, as one who sets a gin,
If at the name of lord at all
He started, but no speech did fall
From his old lips, and wearily
He gat to meat, and she stood by,
And poured the drink to him, and said :

" To such a husband am I wed
That ill is speech with him, when he
Comes home foredone with drudgery ;
And though indeed I deem thee one
Who deeds of fame full oft hath done
And would not fear him, yet most ill
' T would be the bliss of us to spill
In brawl with him, as might betide
If thou his coming shouldst abide.
Our barley barn is close hereby,
Wherein a weary man might lie
And be no worse at dawn of day."

" Well, goodwife," said he, " lead the way !
Worse lodging have I had than that,
Where the wolf howled unto the bat,
And red the woodland stream did run."

She started back, he seemed as one
Who might have come back from the dead,
To wreak upon her evil head
Her sour ill life ; but not the more

He heeded her: "Go on before,"
He said, "for I am in no case
To-night to meet an angry face
And hold my hand from my good sword."

So out she passed without a word,
Though when he took in careful wise
The heavy harp, with greedy eyes
And an ill scowl she gazed thereon,
Yet durst say nought. But soon they won
Unto the barn's door—he turned round,
And, gazing down the rugged ground,
Beheld the sea wide reaching, white
Beneath the new-risen moon, and bright
His face waxed for a little while,
And on the still night did he smile,
As into the dark place he went,—
And saw no more of the grey bent,
Or sea, or sky, or morrow's sun.
Unless perchance when all is done,
And all the wrongs the gods have wrought
Come utterly with them to nought,
New heavens and the earth he shall behold,
And peaceful folk, and days of gold,
When Baldur is come back again
O'er an undying world to reign.

For when the carl came home that night,
In every ill wise that she might,
She egged him on their guest to slay
As sleeping in the barn he lay;
And, since the man was no ill mate
For her, and heedless evil fate
Had made him big and strong enow,
He plucked up heart to strike the blow
Though but a coward thief he was.
So at the grey dawn did he pass
Unto the barn, and entered there;
But through its dusk therewith did hear
The sound of harp-strings tinkling: then,
As is the wont of such-like men,
Great fear of ghosts fell on his heart;
Yet, trembling sore, he thrust apart

The long stems of the barley-straw,
And, peering round about, he saw
Heimir asleep, his naked brand
Laid o'er his knees, but his right hand
Amid the harp-strings, whence there came
A mournful tinkling ; and some name
His lips seemed muttering, and withal
A strange sound on his ears did fall
As of a young child murmuring low
The muffled sounds of passing woe.
Nought dreadful saw he ; yet the hair
'Gan bristle on his head with fear,
And twice was he at point to turn
His bread by other craft to earn ;
But in the end prevailed in him
His raging greed 'gainst glimmerings dim
Of awe and pity ; which but wrought
In such wise in him that he thought
How good it were if all were done,
And day, and noise, and the bright sun
Were come again : he crept along,
Poising a spear, thick shafted, strong,
In his right hand ; and ever fast
His heart beat as the floor he passed,
And o'er his shoulder gazed for fear
Once and again ; he raised the spear,
As Heimir's hand the string still pressed,
And thrust it through his noble breast,
Then turned and fled, and heard behind
A sound as of a wildered wind,
Half moan, half sigh ; then all was still.
But yet such fear his soul did fill
That he stayed not until he came
Into the hall, and cried the name
Of his wife, Grima, in high voice.

“ Ah well,” she said, “ what needs this noise ?
Can ye not see me here ? — Well then ? ”

“ Wife,” said he, “ of the sons of men
I deem him not, rather belike
Odin it was that I did strike.”

She laughed an ill laugh. "Well," she said,
"What then, if only he be dead?"

"What if he only seemed to die?"
He said, "and when night draweth nigh
Shall come again grown twice as great,
And eat where yesternight he ate?
For certes, wife, that harp of his,
No earthly minstrelsy it is,
Since as in sleep the man was laid
Of its own self a tune it played;
Yea, yea, and in a man's voice cried;
Belike a troll therein doth bide."

"An ugly, ill-made minstrel's tool,"
She said; "thou blundering, faint-heart fool!
Some wind moaned through the barn belike,
And the man's hand the strings did strike."

And yet she shivered as she spake,
As though some fear her heart did take,
And neither durst to draw anigh
The barn until the sun was high.
Then in they went together, and saw
The old man lying in the straw,
Scarce otherwise than if asleep,
Though in his heart the spear lay deep,
And round about the floor was red.
Then Grima went, and from the dead
Stripped off the gold ring, while the man
Stood still apart; then she began
To touch the harp, but in no wise
Might open it to reach the prize.
Wherefore she bade her husband bring
Edge-tools to split the cursèd thing.
He brought them trembling, and the twain
Fell to, and soon their end did gain;
But shrank back trembling to see there
The youngling, her grey eyes and clear
Wide open, fearless; but the wife
Knew too much of her own sour life
To fear the other world o'ermuch,
And soon began to pull and touch

The golden raiment of the may;
And at the last took heart to say:

“Be comforted! we shall not die;
For no work is this certainly
Wrought in the country never seen,
But raiment of a Hunnish queen—
Gold seest thou, goodman! gems seest thou!—
No ill work hast thou wrought I trow.
But, for the maiden, we must give
Victuals to her that she may live;
For though to-day she is indeed
But one more mouth for us to feed,
Yet as she waxeth shall she do
Right many a thing to help us two;
Yea, whatso hardest work there is,
That shall be hers—no life of bliss
Like sewing gold mid bower-mays;
She shall be strong, too, as the days
Increase on her.”

Then said the man:
“Get speech from her, for sure she can
Tell somewhat of her life and state.”

But whatso he or his vile mate
Might do, no word at all she spake
Either for threat or promise sake;
Until at last they deemed that she
Was tongue-tied: so now presently
Unto the homestead was she brought,
And her array all golden-wrought
Stripped from her, and in rags of grey
Clad was she. But from light of day
The carl hid Heimir dead, and all
Into dull sodden life did fall.

So with the twain abode the may,
Waxing in beauty day by day
But ever as one tongue-tied was,
What thing soever came to pass;
And needs the hag must call her Crow:
“A name,” she said, “full good enow
For thee—my mother bore it erst.”

So lived the child that she was nursed
On little meat and plenteous blows;
Yet nowise would she weep, but close
Would set her teeth thereat, and go
About what work she had to do,
And ever wrought most sturdily;
Until at last she grew to be
More than a child. And now the place
That once had borne so dull a face
Grew well-nigh bright to look upon,
And whatso thing might shine there shone;
Yea, all but her who brought about
That change therein — for, past all doubt,
Years bettered in nowise our hag,
And ever she said that any rag
Was good enough to clothe the Crow.
And still her hate did grow and grow
As Aslaug grew to womanhood;
Oft would she sit in murderous mood
Long hours, with hand anigh a knife,
As Aslaug slept, all hate at strife
With greed within her; yet withal
Something like fear of her did fall
Upon her heart, and heavy weighed
That awful beauty, that oft stayed
Her hand from closing on the hilt,
E'en more than thought of good things spilt.
Hard words and blows this scarce might stay,
For like the minutes of the day,
Not looked for, noted not when gone,
Were all such things unto the crone,
And, smitten or unsmitten, still
The Crow was swift to work her will.

In spring-tide of her seventeenth year,
On the hill-side the house anear
Went Aslaug, following up her goats:
On such a day as when Love floats
Through the soft air unseen, to touch
Our hearts with longings overmuch
Unshapen into hopes, to make
All things seem fairer for the sake
Of that which cometh, who doth bear

Who knows how much of grief and fear
In his fair arms. So Aslaug went,
On vague and unnamed thoughts intent,
That seemed to her full sweet enow,
And ever greater hope did grow,
And sweet seemed life to her and good,
Small reason why: into the wood
She turned, and wandered slim and fair
"Twixt the dark tree-boles: strange and rare
The sight was of her golden head,
So good, uncoifed, unchapleted,
Above her sordid dark array,
That over her fair body lay
As dark clouds on a liliated hill.
The wild things well might gaze their fill,
As through the wind-flowers brushed her feet,
As her lips smiled when those did meet
The lush cold blue-bells, or were set
Light on the pale dog-violet
Late April bears: the red-throat jay
Screamed not for nought, as on her way
She went, light-laughing at some thought;
If the dove moaned 't was not for nought,
Since she was gone too soon from him,
And e'en the sight he had was dim
For the thick budding twigs. At last
Into an open space she passed,
Nigh filled with a wide, shallow lake,
Amidmost which the fowl did take
Their pastime; o'er the firmer grass,
'Twixt rushy ooze, swift did she pass,
Until upon a bank of sand
Close to the water did she stand,
And gazed down in that windless place
Upon the image of her face,
And as she gazed laughed musically
Once and again; nor heeded she
Her straying flock: her voice, that none
Had heard since Heimir was undone
Within that wretched stead, began
Such speech as well had made a man
Forget his land and kin to make
Those sweet lips tremble for his sake:

"Spring bringeth love," she said, "to all."
She sighed as those sweet sounds did fall
From her unknissed lips: "Ah," said she,
"How came that sweet word unto me,
Among such wretched folk who dwell;
Folk who still seem to carry hell
About with them? — That ancient man
They slew, with whom my life began,
I deem he must have taught me that,
And how the steel-clad maiden sat
Asleep within the ring of flame,
Asleep, and waiting till Love came,
Who was my father: many a dream
I dream thereof, till it doth seem
That they will fetch me hence one day.
Somewhere I deem life must be gay,
The flowers are wrought not for the sake
Of those two murderers."

While she spake
Her hands were busy with her gown,
And at the end it slipped adown
And left her naked there and white
In the unshadowed noontide light.
Like Freyia in her house of gold,
Awhile her limbs did she behold
Clear mirrored in the lake beneath;
Then slowly, with a shuddering breath,
Stepped in the water cold, and played
Amid the ripple that she made,
And spoke again aloud, as though
The lone place of her heart might know:
"Soothly," she said, "if I knew fear,
Scarcely should I be sporting here,
But blinder surely has the crone
In those last months of winter grown,
Nor knows if I be foul or sweet,
Or sharp stripes might I chance to meet,
As heretofore it hath been seen
When I have dared to make me clean
Amid their foulness: loathes her heart
That one she hates should have a part
In the world's joy. — Well, time wears by
I was not made for misery.

Surely if dimly do mine eyes
Behold no sordid tale arise,
No ill life drawing near — who knows
But I am kept for greater woes,
Godlike despair that makes not base,
Though like a stone may grow the face
Because of it, yea, and the heart
A hard-wrought treasure set apart
For the world's glory ? ”

Therewith she
Made for the smooth bank leisurely,
And, naked as she was, did pass
Unto the warm and flowery grass
All unashamed, and fearing not
For ought that should draw nigh the spot:
And soothly had some hunter been
Near by and all her beauty seen,
He would have deemed he saw a fay
And hastened trembling on his way.
But when full joyance she had had
Of sun and flowers, her limbs she clad
In no long time, forsooth, and then
Called back her wandering flock again
With one strange dumb cry, e'en as though
Their hearts and minds she needs must know;
For hurrying back with many a bleat
They huddled round about her feet.
And back she went unto the stead,
Strange visions pressing round her head,
So light of heart and limb, that though
She went with measured steps and slow,
Each yard seemed but a dance to her.

So now the thick wood did she clear,
And o'er the bent beheld the sea,
And stood amazed there suddenly,
For a long-ship, with shield-hung rail,
And fair-stained flapping raven-sail,
And golden dragon-stem, there lay
On balanced oars amidst the bay,
Slow heaving with the unrippled swell.
With a strange hope she might not tell
Her eyes ran down the strand, and there

Lay beached a ship's boat painted fair,
And on the shingle by her side
Three blue-clad axemen did abide
Their fellows, sent belike ashore
To gather victuals for their store.

She looked not long; with heart that beat
More quickly and with hurrying feet
Unto the homestead did she pass,
And when anigh the door she was
She heard men's voices deep and rough;
Then the shrill crone, who said, "Enough
Of work I once had done for you,
But now my days left are but few
And I am weak; I prithee wait,
Already now the noon is late,
My daughter, Crow, shall soon be here."
"Nay," said a shipman, "have no fear,
Goodwife, a speedy death to get,
Thou art a sturdy carline yet:
Howbeit we well may wait awhile."

Thereat Aslaug, with a strange smile,
Fresh from that water in the wood,
Pushed back the crazy door, and stood
Upon the threshold silently;
Bareheaded and barefoot was she,
And scarce her rags held each to each,
Yet did the shipmen stay their speech
And open-mouthed upon her stare,
As with bright eyes and face flushed fair
She stood; one gleaming lock of gold,
Strayed from her fair head's plaited fold,
Fell far below her girdlestead,
And round about her shapely head
A garland of dog-violet
And wind-flowers meetly had she set:
They deemed it little scathe indeed
That her coarse homespun ragged weed
Fell off from her round arms and lithe
Laid on the door-post, that a withe
Of willows was her only belt;
And each as he gazed at her felt
As some gift had been given him.

At last one grumbled, "Nowise dim
It is to see, goodwife, that this
No branch of thy great kinship is."

Grima was glaring on the may,
And scarce for rage found words to say;
"Yea, soothly is she of our kin:
Sixty-five winters changeth skin.
And whatsoever she may be,
Though she is dumb as a dead tree,
She worketh ever double-tide.
So, masters, ope your mealsacks wide
And fall to work; enow of wood
There is, I trow."

And there she stood,
Shaking all o'er, and when the may
Brushed past her going on her way,
From off the board a knife she caught,
And well-nigh had it in her thought
To end it all. Small heed the men
Would take of her, forsooth; and when
They turned their baking-work to speed,
And Aslaug fell the meal to knead,
He was the happiest of them all
Unto whose portion it did fall
To take the loaves from out her hand;
And gaping often would he stand,
And ever he deemed that he could feel
A trembling all along the peel
Whenas she touched it — sooth to say,
Such bread as there was baked that day
Was never seen: such as it was
The work was done, and they did pass
Down toward the ship, and as they went
A dull place seemed the thymy bent,
Gilded by sunset; the fair ship,
That soft in the long swell did dip
Her golden dragon, seemed nought worth,
And they themselves, all void of mirth,
Stammering and blundering in their speech,
Still looking back, seemed each to each
Ill-shapen, ugly, rough and base
As might be found in any place.

Well, saith the tale, and when the bread
Was broken, just as light as lead
Men found the same, as sweet as gall,
Half baked and sodden; one and all
Men gave it to the devil; at last
Unto their lord the story passed,
Who called for them, and bade them say
Why they had wrought in such a way;
They grinned and stammered, till said one:
“We did just e’en as must be done
When men are caught; had it been thou
A-cold had been the oven now.”

“Ye deal in riddles,” said the lord,
“Enough brine is there overboard
To fill you full if even so
Ye needs must have it.”

“We did go,”

The man said, “to a house, and found
That lack of all things did abound;
A yellow-faced and blear-eyed crone
Was in the sooty hall alone;
But as we talked with her, and she
Spake to us ill and craftily,
A wondrous scent was wafted o’er
The space about the open door,
And all the birds drew near to sing,
And summer pushed on into spring,
Until there stood before our eyes
A damsel clad in wretched guise,
Yet surely of the gods I deem,
So fair she was;—well then this dream
Of Freyia on midsummer night,
This breathing love, this once-seen sight,
Flitted amidst us kneading meal,
And from us all the wits did steal;—
Hadst thou been wise?”

“Well,” said the lord,

“This seemeth but an idle word;
Yet since ye all are in one tale
Somewhat to you it may avail—
Speak out! my lady that is dead—

Thora, the chief of goodlihead —
Came this one nigh to her at all ? ”

One answer from their mouths did fall,
That she was fairest ever seen.
“ If two such marvellous things have been
Wrought by the gods, then have they wrought
Exceeding well,” the lord said ; “ nought
Will serve me now but to have sight
Of her, and hear the fresh delight
Of her sweet voice.”

“ Nay, nay,” one cried,
“ The carline called the maid tongue-tied
E’en from her birth.”

But thoughtfully
The lord spake : “ Then belike shall be
Some wonder in the thing. Lo now,
Since I, by reason of my vow
Made on the cup at Yule, no more
May set foot upon any shore
Till I in Micklegarth have been,
And somewhat there of arms have seen,
Go ye at earliest morn and say
That I would see her ere the day
Is quite gone by ; here shall she come
And go as if her father’s home
The good ship were, and I indeed
Her very brother. Odin speed
The matter in some better wise,
Unless your words be nought but lies ! ”

So the next morn she had the word
To come unto their king and lord ;
She answered not, but made as though
Their meaning she did fully know,
And gave assent : the crone was there,
And still askance at her did glare,
And midst her hatred grew afeard
Of what might come, but spoke no word ;
And ye may well believe indeed
That those men gave her little heed,
But stared at Aslaug as she stood
Beside the greasy, blackened wood

Of the hall's uprights, fairer grown
Than yesterday, soft 'neath her gown
Her fair breast heaving, her wide eyes
Mid dreams of far-off things grown wise,
The rock dropped down in her left hand; —
There mazed awhile the men did stand,
Then gat them back. And so the sun
Waxed hot and waned, and, day nigh done,
Gleamed on the ship's side as she lay
Close in at deepest of the bay,
Her bridge gold-hung on either hand
Cast out upon the hard white sand;
While o'er the bulwarks many a man
Gazed forth; and the great lord began
To fret and fume, till on the brow
Of the low cliff they saw her now,
Who stood a moment to behold
The ship's sun-litten flashing gold;
Then slowly 'gan to get her down
A steep path in the sea-cliff brown,
Till on a sudden did she meet
The slant sun cast about its feet,
And flashed as in a golden cloud;
Since scarcely her poor raiment showed
Beneath the glory of her hair,
Whose last lock touched her ankles bare.

For so it was that as she went
Unto this meeting, all intent
Upon the time that was to be,
While yet just hidden from the sea,
She stayed her feet a little while,
And, gazing on her raiment vile,
Flushed red, and muttered, —

“Who can tell
But I may love this great lord well?
An evil thing then should it be
If he cast loathing eyes on me
This first time for my vile attire.”

Then, while her cheek still burned like fire,
She set hand to her hair of gold
Until its many ripples rolled

All over her, and no great queen
Was e'er more gloriously beseen;
And thus she went upon her way.

Now when the crew beheld the may
Set foot upon the sand there rose
A mighty shout from midst of those
Rough seafarers; only the lord
Stood silent gazing overboard
With great eyes, till the bridge she gained,
And still the colour waxed and waned
Within his face; but when her foot
First pressed the plank, to his heart's root
Sweet pain there pierced, for her great eyes
Were fixed on his in earnest wise,
E'en as her thoughts were all of him;
And somewhat now all things waxed dim,
As unto her he stretched his hand,
And felt hers; and the twain did stand
Hearkening each other's eager breath.
But she was changed, for pale as death
She was now as she heard his voice.

"Full well may we this eve rejoice,
Fair maid, that thou hast come to us;
That this grey shore and dolorous
Holds greater beauty than the earth
Mid fairer days may bring to birth,
And that I hold it now. But come
Unto the wind-blown woven home,
Where I have dwelt alone awhile,
And with thy speech the hours beguile."

For nothing he rememberèd
Of what his men unto him said,
That she was dumb. Not once she turned
Her eyes from his; the low sun burned
Within her waving hair, as she
Unto the poop went silently
Beside him, and with faltering feet,
Because this hour seemed over sweet,
And still his right hand held her hand.

But when at last the twain did stand
Beneath the gold-hung tilt alone,
He said, "Thou seemest such an one
As who could love; thou look'st on me
As though thou hopedst love might be
Betwixt us — thou art pale, my sweet,
Good were it if our lips should meet."

Then mouth to mouth long time they stood
And when they sundered the red blood
Burnt in her cheek, and tenderly
Trembled her lips, and drew anigh
His lips again: but speech did break
Swiftly from out them, and she spake:
"May it be so, fair man, that thou
Art even no less happy now
Than I am."

With a joyous cry
He caught her to him hastily;
And mid that kiss the sun went down,
And colder was the dark world grown.
Once more they parted; "Ah, my love,"
He said, "I knew not ought could move
My heart to such joy as thy speech."

She made as if she fain would reach
Her lips to his once more; but ere
They touched, as smitten by new fear,
She drew aback and said: "Alas!
It darkens, and I needs must pass
Back to the land, to be more sad
Than if this joy I ne'er had had.
And thou — thou shalt be sorry too,
And pity me that it is so."

"To-morrow morn comes back the day,"
He said, "If we should part, sweet may:
Yet why should I be left forlorn
Betwixt this even and the morn?"

His hand had swept aback her hair,
And on her shoulder, gleaming bare
From midst her rags, was trembling now;
But she drew back, and o'er her brow

Gathered a troubled thoughtful frown,
And on the bench she sat her down
And spake: "Nay, it were wise to bide
Awhile. Behold, the world is wide,
Yet have we found each other here,
And each to other seems more dear
Than all the world else. — Yet a king
Thou art, and I am such a thing,
By some half-dreamed-of chance cast forth
To live a life of little worth,
A lonely life — and it may be
That thou shouldst weary soon of me
If I abode here now — and I,
How know I? All unhappily
My life has gone; scarce a kind word
Except in dreams my ears have heard
But those thy lovely lips have said:
It might be when all things were weighed
That I too light of soul should prove
To hold for ever this great love."

Down at her feet therewith he knelt,
And round her his strong arms she felt
Drawing her to him, as he said:
"These are strange words for thee, O maid;
Are those sweet loving lips grown cold
So soon? Yet art thou in my hold,
And certainly my heart is hot.
What help against me hast thou got?"

Each unto each their cheeks were laid,
As in a trembling voice she said:
"No help, because so dear to me
Thou art, and mighty as may be;
Thou hast seen much, art wiser far
Than I am; yet strange thoughts there are
In my mind now — some half-told tale
Stirs in me, if I might avail
To tell it."

Suddenly she rose,
And thrust him from her; "Ah, too close!
Too close now, and too far apart
To-morrow! — and a barren heart,

And days that ever fall to worse,
And blind lives struggling with a curse
They cannot grasp! Look on my face,
Because I deem me of a race
That knoweth such a tale too well
Yet if there be such tale to tell
Of us twain, let it e'en be so,
Rather than we should fail to know
This love — ah me, my love forbear!
No pain for thee and me I fear;
Yet strive we e'en for more than this!
Thou who hast given me my first bliss
To-day, forgive me, that in turn
I see the pain within thee burn,
And may not help — because mine eyes
The Gods make clear. I am grown wise
With gain of love, and hope of days
That many a coming age shall praise."

Awhile he gazed on her, and shook
With passion, and his cloak's hem took
With both hands as to rend it down;
Yet from his brow soon cleared the frown:
He said: "Yea, such an one thou art,
As needs alone must fill my heart
If I be like my father's kin,
And have a hope great deeds to win;
And surely nought shall hinder me
From living a great life with thee —
Say now what thou wouldst have me do."

"Some deed of fame thou goest to,"
She said, "for surely thou art great;
Go on thy way then, and if fate
So shapen is, that thou mayst come
Once more unto this lonely home,
There shalt thou find me, who will live
Through whatso days that fate may give,
Till on some happy coming day
Thine oars again make white the bay."

"If that might be remembered now,"
He said, "Last Yule I made a vow

In some far land to win me fame.
Come nigher, sweet, and hear my name
Before thou goest; that if so be
Death take me and my love from thee,
Thou mayst then think of who I was,
Nor let all memory of me pass
When thou to some great king art wed:
Then shalt thou say, 'Ragnar is dead,
Who was the son of Sigurd Ring,
Among the Danes a mighty king.
He might have had me by his side,'
Then shalt thou say, 'that hour he died;
But my heart failed and not his heart.'"

"Nay, make it not too hard to part,"
She said, when once again their lips
Had sundered; "as gold-bearing ships
Foundered amidmost of the sea,
So shall the loves of most men be,
And leave no trace behind. God wot
This heart of mine shall hate thee not
Whatso befall; but rather bless
Thee and this hour of happiness;
And if this tide shall come again
After hard longing and great pain,
How sweet, how sweet! O love, farewell,
Lest other tale there be to tell:
Yet heed this now lest afterward
It seem to thee a thing too hard
To keep thy faith to such as me;
I am belike what thou dost see,
A goatherd girl, a peasant maid,
Of a poor wretched crone afraid,
From dawn to dusk; despite of dreams
In morning tides, and misty gleams
Of wondrous stories, deem me such
As I have said, nor overmuch
Cast thou thy love upon my heart
If even such a man thou art
As needs must wed a great man's child."

He stepped aback from her and smiled,
And, stooping 'neath the lamp, drew forth

From a great chest a thing of worth—
A silken sark wrought wondrously
In some far land across the sea.
“One thing this is of many such
That I were fain thy skin should touch,”
He said, “if thou wouldst have it so.”
But his voice faltered and sank low,
As though her great heart he ’gan fear.
She reached her fine strong hand anear
The farfetched thing; then smiling said:
“Strange that such fair things can be made
By men who die; and like it is
Thou think’st me worthy of all bliss;
But our rough hills and smoky house
Befit not ought so glorious,
E’en if thou come again to me;
And if not, greater grief to see
The gifts of dead love! — what say I,
Our crone should wear these certainly
If I but brought them unto land.”

He flushed red, and his strong right hand
Fell to his sword-hilt. “Nay,” she said,
“All that is nought if rightly weighed;
Hope and desire shall pass the days
If thou come back.”

Grave was her face
And tremulous: he sighed; “Then take
This last gift only for my sake.”
And once again their lips did touch
And cling together. “O many such,”
She said, “if the time did not fail,
And my heart too: of what avail
Against the hand of fate to strive?
Let me begin my life to live,
As it must be a weary space.”

The moon smote full upon her face,
As on a trembling sea, as now
From the lamp-litten gold tilt low
She stepped into the fresher air,
He with her. Slow the twain did fare
Amidst the wondering men, till they

Had reached the bridge; then swift away
She turned, and passed the gold-hung rail,
And o'er the sands the moon made pale
Went gleaming, all alone: and he
Watched till her light feet steadily
Stepped up upon the dark cliff's brow:
But no one time she turned her now,
But vanished from him into night.
So there he watched till changing light
Brought the beginning of the tide
Of longing that he needs must bide;
Then he cried out for oars and sail,
And ere the morning star did fail
No more those cliffs his bird beheld,
As 'neath the wind the broad sail swelled.

But for the maiden, back she went
Unto the stead, and her intent
She changed in nought: no word she spake
What wrath soe'er on her might break
From the fell crone, on whom withal
Still heavier did that strange awe fall;
As well might be, for from the may
Had girlish lightness passed away
Into a sweet grave majesty,
That scarce elsewhere the world might see.

So wore the spring, and summer came
And went, and all the woods did flame
With autumn, as in that old tide
When slowly by the mirk hill-side
Went Heimir to his unseen death:
Then came the first frost's windless breath,
The steaming sea, the world all white,
And glittering morn and silent night,
As when the little one first felt
The world a-cold; and still she dwelt
Unchanged since that first spark of love
Wrought the great change, that so did move
Her heart to perfect loveliness.
Nor overmuch did the days press

Upon her with the weary waste
Of short life, that too quick doth haste
When joy is gained: if any thought
Thereof unto her heart was brought,
Rather it was, "Ah, overlong
For brooding over change and wrong
When that shall come! Good gain to me
My love's eyes one more time to see,
To feel once more his lips' delight,
And die with the short summer night,
Not shamed nor sorry! But if I
Must bear the weight of misery
In the after days, yet even then
May I not leave to unborn men
A savour of sweet things, a tale
That midst all woes shall yet prevail
To make the world seem something worth?"

So passed the winter of the North,
And once again was come the spring;
Then whiles would she go loitering
Slow-footed, and with hanging head,
Through budding break, o'er flowery mead,
With blood that throbbed full quickly now,
If o'er the flowers her feet were slow,
And bonds about her seemed to be.
Yet wore the spring-tide lingeringly
Till on a morn of latter May,
When her soft sleep had passed away,
Nought but the bright-billed sweet-throat bird
Within the thorn at first she heard;
But, even as her heart did meet
The first wave of desire o'ersweet,
The winding of a mighty horn
Adown the breeze of May was borne,
And throbbing hope on her did fall:
Yet from her bed she leapt withal,
And clad herself, and went about
Her work, as though with ne'er a doubt
That this day e'en such like should be
As was the last; and so while she
Quickened the fire and laid the board,
Mid the crone's angry, peevish word

Of surly wonder, the goodman,
With axe on shoulder, swiftly ran
Adown the slope; but presently
Came breathless back:

“Ah, here they be!
Come back again for something worse,”
Said he. “This dumb maid is some curse
Laid on us.”

“Well,” the goodwife said,
“Who be they?” “They who baked their bread
Within this house last spring,” said he.
“Oft did I marvel then why she,
This witch-maid, went unto the strand
That eve.”

“Nay, maybe comes to hand
Some luck,” the crone said. “Hold thy peace,”
He said. “What goodhap or increase
From that ill night shall ever come?
Rather I deem that now come home
Those fifteen years of murder: lo,
The worst of all we soon shall know,
I hear their voices.”

Silently,
If somewhat pale, Aslaug passed by
From fire to board, as though she heard
And noted nothing of that word,
Whate’er it was: yet now, indeed,
The clink of sword on iron weed,
And voices of the seafarers,
Came clear enow unto her ears;
Nor was it long or e’er the door
Was darkened, as one stood before
The light and cried:

“Hail to this house,
If here still dwells the glorious
Fair maiden, that across the seas
We come for!”

Aslaug on her knees
Knelt by the brightening fire and dropped
The meal into the pot, nor stopped
For all their words, but with her hand
Screened her fair face. Then up did stand
The goodman, quaking:

“Well,” he said,
“Good be my meed! for we have fed
This dumb maid all for kindness’ sake.”

“No need,” he said, “long words to make,
And little heed we thy lies now,
But if she doom thee to the bough.
—All hail, our Lady and our Queen!”

For she, arisen, with glorious mien
Was drawing near the board, and bare
The porridge-bowl and such-like gear
Past where the men stood; tremblingly
The leader of them drew anigh,
And would have taken them, but she
Swerved from his strong hand daintily,
Smiled on him and passed by, and when
They were set down turned back again
And spoke, and well then might rejoice
That dusky place to hear her voice
For the first time:

“I doubt me not,
O seafarers, but ye have got
A message from that goodly lord
Who spake last year a pleasant word,
Hard to believe for a poor maid.”

Trembled the twain at what she said
Less than the unexpected sound,
For death seemed in the air around.
But the man spake: “E’en thus he saith,
That he, who heretofore feared death
In nowise, feared this morn to come
And seek thee out in thy poor home,
Lest he should find thee dead or gone;
For scarce he deemed so sweet a one
Could be for him: ‘But if she live,’
He said, ‘and still her love can give
To me, let her make no delay,
For fear we see no other day
Wherein to love.’”

She said: “Come, then!
It shames me not that of all men

I love him best. But have ye there
Somewhat these twain might reckon dear?
Their life is ill enow to live
But that withal they needs must strive
With griping want when I am gone."

He answered, "O thou goodly one,
Here have we many a dear-bought thing,
Because our master bade us bring
All queenly gear for thee, and deems
That thou, so clad as well beseems
That lovely body, wouldst aboard;
But all we have is at thy word
To keep or spend."

"Nay, friends," she said,
"If thy lord loves my goodlihead,
Fain would I bear alone to him
What wealth I have of face or limb,
For him to deck when all is his,
So full enow shall even this
That I am dight with be for me;
But since indeed of his bounty
He giveth unto me to give —
Take ye this gold, ye twain, and live
E'en as ye may — small need to bless
Or curse your sordid churlishness,
Because methinks, without fresh curse,
Each day that comes shall still be worse
Than the past day, and worst of all
Your ending day on you shall fall.
Yet, if it may be, fare ye well,
Since in your house I came to dwell
Some wearing of my early days."

E'en as she spake, her glorious face
Shone the last time on that abode,
And her light feet the daisies trod
Outside the threshold. But the twain
Stood mazed above the bounteous gain
Of rings and gems and money bright,
And a long while, for mere affright
And wonder, durst not handle it.

But while the butterfly did flit
White round about the feet of her,
Above the little May-flowers fair,
She went adown the hill with these,
Until the low wash of the seas
They heard, and murmuring of the men
Who manned the long-ships; quickly then
They showed above the grey bent's brow,
And all the folk beheld them now
"Twixt oar and gunwale that abode,
And to the sky their shout rose loud.
But when upon the beach she came,
A bright thing in the sun did flame
"Twixt sun and ship-side, and the sea
Foamed, as one waded eagerly
Unto the smooth and sea-beat sand,
And for one moment did she stand
Breathless, with beating heart, and then
To right and left drew back the men;
She heard a voice she deemed well known,
Long waited through dull hours bygone,
And round her mighty arms were cast:
But when her trembling red lips passed
From out the heaven of that dear kiss,
And eyes met eyes, she saw in his
Fresh pride, fresh hope, fresh love, and saw
The long sweet days still onward draw,
Themselves still going hand in hand,
As now they went adown the strand.

Next morn, when they awoke to see
Each other's hands draw lovingly
Each unto each, awhile they lay
Silent, as though night passed away
They grudged full sore: till the king said
Unto the happy golden head
That lay upon his breast, "What thought
By those few hours of dark was brought
Unto thy heart, my love? Did dreams
Make strange thy loving sleep with gleams
Of changing days that yet may be?"

She answered, but still dreamily :
 " In sleep a little while ago
 O'er a star-litten world of snow
 I fared, till suddenly near by
 A swirling fire blazed up on high ;
 Thereto I went, and without scathe
 Passed through the flame, as one doth bathe
 Within a summer stream, and there
 I saw a golden palace fair
 Ringed round about with roaring flame.
 Unto an open door I came,
 And entered a great hall thereby,
 And saw where 'neath a canopy
 A king and queen there sat, more fair
 Than the world knoweth elsewhere :
 And much methought my heart smiled then
 Upon that goodliest of all men,
 That sweetest of all womankind.
 Then one methought a horn did wind
 Without, and the king turned and spake :

" " Wherewith do the hall pillars shake,
 O queen, O love ? "

She moved her head,
 And in a voice like music said :
 ' This is the fame of Ragnar's life,
 The breath of all the glorious strife
 Wherewith his days shall wear. '

Then he :

' What is the shadow that I see
 Adown the hall ? '

Then said the queen :
 ' Our daughter surely hadst thou seen
 If thine eyes saw as clear as mine :
 Well worth she is our love divine,
 And unto Ragnar is she wed,
 The best man since that thou art dead,
 My king, my love, mine own, mine own. '

" Then the twain kissed upon the throne,
 And the dream passed and sleep passed too. "

Therewith the king her body drew
Nearer to him, if it might be,
And spake: "A strange dream came to me.
Upon a waste at dawn I went
And wandered over vale and bent,
And ever was it dawn of day,
And still upon all sides there lay
The bones of men, and war-gear turned
To shards and rust; then far off burned
A fire, and thither quick I passed.
And when I came to it at last
Dreadful it seemed, impassable;
But I, fain of that land to tell
What things soever might be known,
Went round about, and up and down,
And gat no passing by the same;
Until, methought, just where the flame
Burned highest, through the midst I saw
A man and woman toward me draw,
Even as through a flowery wood:
So came they unto where I stood,
And glad at heart therewith I grew,
For such fair folk as were the two
Ne'er had I seen; then the man cried:

"Hail to thee, Ragnar! well betide
This dawn of day. Stretch forth thine hand.'

"E'en as he bade me did I stand,
Abiding what should hap, but he
Turned to the woman lovingly,
And from her bosom's fresh delight
Drew forth a blooming lily white,
And set it in mine hand, and then
Both through the flame went back again.

"Then afterwards in earth I set
This lily, and with soft regret
Watched for its fading; but withal
Great light upon the world did fall,
And fair the sun rose o'er the earth,
And blithe I grew and full of mirth:

And no more on a waste I was,
But in a green world, where the grass
White lily-blooms well-nigh did hide;
O'er hill and valley far and wide
They waved in the warm wind; the sun
Seemed shining upon every one,
As though it loved it: and with that
I woke, and up in bed I sat
And saw thee waking, O my sweet!"

With that last word their lips did meet,
And even the fresh May morning bright
Was noted not in their delight.

Let be — as ancient stories tell
Full knowledge upon Ragnar fell
In lapse of time, that this was she
Begot in the felicity
Swift-fleeting, of the wondrous twain,
Who afterwards through change and pain
Must live apart to meet in death.

But, would ye know what the tale saith,
In the Old Danish tongue is writ
Full many a word concerning it, —
The days through which these lovers passed,
Till death made end of all at last.
But so great Ragnar's glory seemed
To Northern folk, that many deemed
That for his death, when song arose
From that Northumbrian Adder-close,
England no due atonement paid
Till Harald Godwinson was laid
Beside his fallen banner, cold
Upon the blood-soaked Sussex mould,
And o'er the wrack of Senlac field
Full-fed the grey-nebbed raven wheeled.

SIGURD THE VOLSUNG.²⁵
(SELECTIONS.)

SIGURD THE VOLSUNG.

REGIN.

OF THE FORGING OF THE SWORD THAT IS CALLED THE
WRATH OF SIGURD.²⁶

Now again came Sigurd to Regin, and said: "Thou hast
taught me a task
Whereof none knoweth the ending: and a gift at thine
hands I ask."

Then answered Regin the Master: "The world must be
wide indeed
If my hand may not reach across it for ought thine heart
may need."

"Yea wide is the world," said Sigurd, "and soon spoken
is thy word;
But this gift thou shalt nought gainsay me: for I bid
thee forge me a sword."

Then spake the Master of Masters, and his voice was
sweet and soft,
"Look forth abroad, O Sigurd, and note in the heavens
aloft
How the dim white moon of the daylight hangs round as
the Goth-God's shield:
Now for thee first rang mine anvil when she walked the
heavenly field
A slim and lovely lady, and the old moon lay on her arm:
Lo, here is a sword I have wrought thee with many a
spell and charm
And all the craft of the Dwarf-kind; be glad thereof and
sure;
Mid many a storm of battle full well shall it endure."

Then Sigurd looked on the slayer, and never a word
would speak:
Gemmed were the hilts and golden, and the blade was
blue and bleak,
And runes of the Dwarf-kind's cunning each side the
trench were scored:
But soft and sweet spake Regin: "How likest thou the
sword?"

Then Sigurd laughed and answered: "The work is
proved by the deed;
See now if this be a traitor to fail me in my need."

Then Regin trembled and shrank, so bright his eyes out-
shone
As he turned about to the anvil, and smote the sword
thereon;
But the shards fell shivering earthward, and Sigurd's
heart grew wroth
As the steel-flakes tinkled about him: "Lo, there the
right-hand's troth!
Lo, there the golden glitter, and the word that soon is
spilt."
And down amongst the ashes he cast the glittering hilt,
And turned his back on Regin and strode out through
the door
And for many a day of spring-tide came back again no
more.
But at last he came to the stithy and again took up the
word:
"What hast thou done, O Master, in the forging of the
sword?"

Then sweetly Regin answered: "Hard task-master art
thou,
But lo, a blade of battle that shall surely please thee now!
Two moons are clean departed since thou lookedst toward
the sky
And sawest the dim white circle amid the cloud-flecks lie;
And night and day have I laboured; and the cunning of
old days
Hath surely left my right-hand if this sword thou shalt
not praise."

And indeed the hilts gleamed glorious with many a dear-
 bought stone,
 And down the fallow edges the light of battle shone ;
 Yet Sigurd's eyes shone brighter, nor yet might Regin
 face
 Those eyes of the heart of the Volsungs ; but trembled in
 his place
 As Sigurd cried : " O Regin, thy kin of the days of old
 Were an evil and treacherous folk, and they lied and
 murdered for gold ;
 And now if thou wouldst bewray me, of the ancient
 curse beware,
 And set thy face as the flint the bale and the shame to
 bear :
 For he that would win to the heavens, and be as the Gods
 on high
 Must tremble nought at the road, and the place where
 men-folk die."

White leaps the blade in his hand and gleams in the gear
 of the wall,
 And he smites, and the oft-smitten edges on the beaten
 anvil fall :
 But the life of the sword departed, and dull and broken
 it lay
 On the ashes and flaked-off iron, and no word did Sigurd
 say,
 But strode off through the door of the stithy and went to
 the Hall of Kings,
 And was merry and blithe that even mid all imaginings.

But when the morrow was come he went to his mother
 and spake :
 " The shards, the shards of the sword, that thou gleanedst
 for my sake
 In the night on the field of slaughter, in the tide when
 my father fell,
 Hast thou kept them through sorrow and joyance ? hast
 thou warded them trusty and well ?
 Where hast thou laid them, my mother ? "

Then she looked upon him and said :
 " Art thou wroth, O Sigurd my son, that such eyes are in
 thine head ?

And wilt thou be wroth with thy mother? do I withstand thee at all?"

"Nay," said he, "nought am I wrathful, but the days rise up like a wall

Betwixt my soul and the deeds, and I strive to rend them through.

And why wilt thou fear mine eyen? as the sword lies baleful and blue

E'en 'twixt the lips of lovers, when they swear their troth thereon,

So keen are the eyes ye have fashioned, ye folk of the days ago;

For therein is the light of battle, though whiles it lieth asleep.

Now give me the sword, my mother, that Sigmund gave thee to keep."

She said: "I shall give it thee gladly, for fain shall I be of thy praise

When thou knowest my careful keeping of that hope of the earlier days."

So she took his hand in her hand, and they went their ways, they twain,

Till they came to the treasure of queen-folk, the guarded chamber of gain:

They were all alone with its riches, and she turned the key in the gold,

And lifted the sea-born purple, and the silken web unrolled,

And lo, 'twixt her hands and her bosom the shards of Sigmund's sword;

No rust-fleck stained its edges, and the gems of the ocean's hoard

Were as bright in the hilts and glorious, as when in the Volsungs' hall

It shone in the eyes of the earl-folk and flashed from the shielded wall.

But Sigurd smiled upon it, and he said: "O Mother of Kings,

Well hast thou warded the war-glaive for a mirror of many things,

And a hope of much fulfilment: well hast thou given to
me
The message of my fathers, and the word of things to
be:
Trusty hath been thy warding, but its hour is over now:
These shards shall be knit together, and shall hear the
war-wind blow.
They shall shine through the rain of Odin, at the sun
come back to the world,
When the heaviest bolt of the thunder amidst the storm
is hurled:
They shall shake the thrones of Kings, and shear the
walls of war,
And undo the knot of treason when the world is darken-
ing o'er.
They have shone in the dusk and the night-tide, they
shall shine in the dawn and the day;
They have gathered the storm together, they shall chase
the clouds away;
They have sheared red gold asunder, they shall gleam
o'er the garnered gold;
They have ended many a story, they shall fashion a tale
to be told:
They have lived in the wrack of the people; they shall
live in the glory of folk:
They have stricken the Gods in battle, for the Gods shall
they strike the stroke."

Then she felt his hands about her as he took the fateful
sword,
And he kissed her soft and sweetly; but she answered
never a word:
So great and fair was he waxen, so glorious was his face,
So young, as the deathless Gods are, that long in the
golden place
She stood when he was departed: as some for-travailed
one
Comes over the dark fell-ridges on the birth-tide of the
sun,
And his gathering sleep falls from him mid the glory and
the blaze;
And he sees the world grow merry and looks on the light-
ened ways,

While the ruddy streaks are melting in the day-flood
broad and white;
Then the morn-dusk he forgetteth, and the moon-lit waste
of night,
And the hall whence he departed with its yellow candles'
flare:
So stood the Isle-king's daughter in that treasure-chamber
fair.

But swift on his ways went Sigurd, and to Regin's house
he came,
Where the Master stood in the doorway and behind him
leapt the flame,
And dark he looked and little: no more his speech was
sweet,
No words on his lip were gathered the Volsung child to
greet,
Till he took the sword from Sigurd and the shards of the
days of old;
Then he spake:

“Will nothing serve thee save this blue
steel and cold,
The bane of thy father's father, the fate of all his kin,
The baleful blade I fashioned, the Wrath that the Gods
would win?”

Then answered the eye-bright Sigurd: “If thou thy
craft wilt do
Nought save these battle-gleanings shall be my helper
true:
And what if thou begrudgest, and my battle-blade be dull,
Yet the hand of the Norns is lifted and the cup is over-
full.
Repent'st thou ne'er so sorely that thy kin must lie alow,
How much soe'er thou longest the world to overthrow,
And, doubting the gold and the wisdom, wouldst even
now appease
Blind hate and eyeless murder, and win the world with
these;
O'er-late is the time for repenting the word thy lips have
said:
Thou shalt have the Gold and the wisdom and take its
curse on thine head.

I say that thy lips have spoken, and no more with thee it
lies
To do the deed or leave it: since thou hast shown mine
eyes
The world that was aforetime, I see the world to be;
And woe to the tangling thicket, or the wall that hin-
dereth me!
And short is the space I will tarry; for how if the Worm
should die
Ere the first of my strokes be stricken? Wilt thou get
to thy mastery
And knit these shards together that once in the Bran-
stock stood?
But if not and a smith's hands fail me, a King's hand yet
shall be good;
And the Norns have doomed thy brother. And yet I
deem this sword
Is the slayer of the Serpent, and the scatterer of the
Hoard."

Great waxed the gloom of Regin, and he said: "Thou
sayest sooth,
For none may turn him backward: the sword of a very
youth
Shall one day end my cunning, as the Gods my joyance
slew,
When nought thereof they were deeming, and another
thing would do.
But this sword shall slay the Serpent, and do another
deed,
And many an one thereafter till it fail thee in thy
need.
But as fair and great as thou standest, yet get thee from
mine house,
For in me too might ariseth, and the place is perilous
With the craft that was aforetime, and shall never be
again,
When the hands that have taught thee cunning have
failed from the world of men.
Thou art wroth; but thy wrath must slumber till fate its
blossom bear;
Not thus were the eyes of Odin when I held him in the
snare.

Depart ! lest the end overtake us ere thy work and mine
be done,
But come again in the night-tide and the slumber of the
sun,
When the sharded moon of April hangs round in the
undark May."

Hither and thither awhile did the heart of Sigurd sway ;
For he feared no craft of the Dwarf-kind, nor heeded the
ways of Fate,
But his hand wrought e'en as his heart would : and now
was he weary with hate
Of the hatred and scorn of the Gods, and the greed of
gold and of gain,
And the weaponless hands of the stripling of the wrath
and the rending were fain.
But there stood Regin the Master, and his eyes were on
Sigurd's eyes,
Though nought belike they beheld him, and his brow was
sad and wise ;
And the greed died out of his visage and he stood like
an image of old.

So the Norns drew Sigurd away, and the tide was an
even of gold,
And sweet in the April even were the fowl-kind singing
their best ;
And the light of life smote Sigurd, and the joy that
knows no rest,
And the fond unnamed desire, and the hope of hidden
things ;
And he wended fair and lovely to the house of the feast-
ing Kings.

But now when the moon was at full and the undark May
begun,
Went Sigurd unto Regin mid the slumber of the sun,
And amidst the fire-hall's pavement the King of the
Dwarf-kind stood
Like an image of deeds departed and days that once
were good ;
And he seemed but faint and weary, and his eyes were
dim and dazed

As they met the glory of Sigurd where the fitful candles
blazed.

Then he spake:

“Hail, Son of the Volsungs, the corner-
stone is laid,
I have toiled and thou hast desired, and, lo, the fateful
blade!”

Then Sigurd saw it lying on the ashes slaked and pale
Like the sun and the lightning mingled mid the even’s
cloudy bale;

For ruddy and great were the hilts, and the edges fine
and wan,

And all adown to the blood-point a very flame there ran
That swallowed the runes of wisdom wherewith its sides
were scored.

No sound did Sigurd utter as he stooped adown for his
sword,

But it seemed as his lips were moving with speech of
strong desire.

White leapt the blade o’er his head, and he stood in the
ring of its fire

As hither and thither it played, till it fell on the anvil’s
strength,

And he cried aloud in his glory, and held out the sword
full length,

As one who would show it the world; for the edges were
dulled no whit,

And the anvil was cleft to the pavement with the dread-
ful dint of it.

But Regin cried to his harp-strings: “Before the days
of men

I smithied the Wrath of Sigurd, and now is it smithied
again:

And my hand alone hath done it, and my heart alone
hath dared

To bid that man to the mountain, and behold his glory
bared.

Ah, if the Son of Sigmund might wot of the thing I would,
Then how were the ages bettered, and the world all waxen
good!

Then how were the past forgotten and the weary days of
yore,
And the hope of man that dieth and the waste that never
bore!
How should this one live through the winter and know
of all increase!
How should that one spring to the sunlight and bear the
blossom of peace!
No more should the long-lived wisdom o'er the waste of
the wilderness stray;
Nor the clear-eyed hero hasten to the deedless ending of
day.
And what if the hearts of the Volsungs for this deed of
deeds were born,
How then were their life-days evil and the end of their
lives forlorn?"

There stood Sigurd the Volsung, and heard how the harp-
strings rang,
But of other things they told him than the hope that the
Master sang;
And his world lay far away from the Dwarf-king's eye-
less realm
And the road that leadeth nowhere, and the ship without
a helm:
But he spake: "How oft shall I say it, that I shall work
thy will?
If my father hath made me mighty, thine heart shall I
fulfil
With the wisdom and gold thou wouldest, before I wend
on my ways;
For now hast thou failed me nought, and the sword is
the wonder of days."

No word for a while spake Regin; but he hung his head
adown
As a man that pondereth sorely, and his voice once more
was grown
As the voice of the smithying-master as he spake: "This
Wrath of thine
Hath cleft the hard and the heavy; it shall shear the
soft and the fine:

Come forth to the night and prove it."

So they twain

went forth abroad,
And the moon lay white on the river and lit the sleep-
less ford,
And down to its pools they wended, and the stream was
swift and full;
Then Regin cast against it a lock of fine-spun wool,
And it whirled about on the eddy till it met the edges
bared,
And as clean as the careless water the laboured fleece
was sheared.

Then Regin spake: "It is good, what the smithying-carl
hath wrought:
Now the work of the King beginneth, and the end that
my soul hath sought.
Thou shalt toil and I shall desire, and the deed shall be
surely done:
For thy Wrath is alive and awake and the story of bale
is begun."

Therewith was the Wrath of Sigurd laid soft in a golden
sheath
And the peace-strings knit around it; for that blade was
fain of death;
And 'tis ill to show such edges to the broad blue light
of day,
Or to let the hall-glare light them, if ye list not play the
play.

SIGURD SLAYETH REGIN THE MASTER OF MASTERS ON
THE GLITTERING HEATH.²⁷

There standeth Sigurd the Volsung, and leaneth on his
sword,
And beside him now is Greyfell and looks on his golden
lord,
And the world is awake and living; and whither now
shall they wend,
Who have come to the Glittering Heath, and wrought
that deed to its end?

For hither comes Regin the Master from the skirts of
the field of death,
And he shadeth his eyes from the sunlight as afoot he
goeth and saith :

“Ah, let me live for a while ! for a while and all shall be
well,

When passed is the house of murder and I creep from
the prison of hell.”

Afoot he went o’er the desert, and he came unto Sigurd
and stared

At the golden gear of the man, and the Wrath yet bloody
and bared,

And the light locks raised by the wind, and the eyes
beginning to smile,

And the lovely lips of the Volsung, and the brow that
knew no guile ;

And he murmured under his breath while his eyes grew
white with wrath :

“O who art thou, and wherefore, and why art thou in
the path ?”

Then he turned to the ash-grey Serpent, and grovelled
low on the ground,

And he drank of that pool of the blood where the stones
of the wild were drowned,

And long he lapped as a dog ; but when he arose again,
Lo, a flock of the mountain-eagles that drew to the feast-
ful plain ;

And he turned and looked on Sigurd, as bright in the
sun he stood,

A stripling fair and slender, and wiped the Wrath of the
blood.

But Regin cried : “O Dwarf-kind, O many-shifting folk,
O shapes of might and wonder, am I too freed from the
yoke

That binds my soul to my body a withered thing forlorn,
While the short-lived fools of man-folk so fair and oft
are born ?

Now swift in the air shall I be, and young in the con-
course of Kings,

If my heart shall come to desire the gain of earthly
things.”

And he looked and saw how Sigurd was sheathing the
Flame of War,
And the eagles screamed in the wind, but their voice
came faint from afar :
Then he scowled, and crouched, and darkened, and came
to Sigurd and spake :
“ O child, thou hast slain my brother, and the Wrath is
alive and awake.”

“ Thou sayest sooth,” said Sigurd, “ thy deed and mine
is done :
But now our ways shall sunder, for here, meseemeth, the
sun
Hath but little of deeds to do, and no love to win aback.”

Then Regin crouched before him, and he spake : “ Fare
on to the wrack !
Fare on to the murder of men, and the deeds of thy
kindred of old !
And surely of thee as of them shall the tale be speedily
told.
Thou hast slain thy Master’s brother, and what wouldst
thou say thereto,
Were the judges met for the judging and the doom-ring
hallowed due ? ”

Then Sigurd spake as aforetime : “ Thy deed and mine
it was,
And now our ways shall sunder, and into the world will
I pass.”

But Regin darkened before him, and exceeding grim was
he grown,
And he spake : “ Thou hast slain my brother, and where-
with wilt thou atone ? ”

“ Stand up, O Master,” said Sigurd, “ O Singer of ancient
days,
And take the wealth I have won thee, ere we wend on
sundering ways.
I have toiled and thou hast desired, and the Treasure is
surely anear,
And thou hast wisdom to find it, and I have slain thy
fear.”

But Regin crouched and darkened : "Thou hast slain my brother," he said.

"Take thou the Gold," quoth Sigurd, "for the ransom of my head !"

Then Regin crouched and darkened, and over the earth he hung ;

And he said : "Thou hast slain my brother, and the Gods are yet but young."

Bright Sigurd towered above him, and the Wrath cried out in the sheath,

And Regin writhed against it as the adder turns on death ;

And he spake : "Thou hast slain my brother, and to-day shalt thou be my thrall :

Yea a King shall be my cook-boy and this heath my cooking-hall."

Then he crept to the ash-grey coils where the life of his brother had lain,

And he drew a glaive from his side and smote the smitten and slain,

And tore the heart from Fafnir, while the eagles cried o'erhead,

And sharp and shrill was their voice o'er the entrails of the dead.

Then Regin spake to Sigurd : "Of this slaying wilt thou be free ?

Then gather thou fire together and roast the heart for me, That I may eat it and live, and be thy master and more ; For therein was might and wisdom, and the grudged and hoarded lore :—

— Or else, depart on thy ways afraid from the Glittering Heath."

Then he fell abackward and slept, nor set his sword in the sheath,

But his hand was red on the hilts and blue were the edges bared,

Ash-grey was his visage waxen, and with open eyes he stared

On the height of heaven above him, and a fearful thing
he seemed,
As his soul went wide in the world, and of rule and king-
ship he dreamed.

But Sigurd took the Heart, and wood on the waste he
found,
The wood that grew and died, as it crept on the niggard
ground,
And grew and died again, and lay like whitened bones ;
And the ernes cried over his head, as he builded his
hearth of stones,
And kindled the fire for cooking, and sat and sang o'er
the roast
The song of his fathers of old, and the Wolfings' gather-
ing host :
So there on the Glittering Heath rose up the little flame,
And the dry sticks crackled amidst it, and alow the eagles
came,
And seven they were by tale, and they pitched all round
about
The cooking-fire of Sigurd, and sent their song-speech out :
But nought he knoweth its wisdom, or the word that they
would speak :
And hot grew the Heart of Fafnir and sang amid the
reek.

Then Sigurd looketh on Regin, and he deemeth it over-
long
That he dighteth the dear-bought morsel, and the might
for the Master of wrong,
So he reacheth his hand to the roast to see if the cook-
ing be o'er ;
But the blood and the fat seethed from it and scalded his
finger sore,
And he set his hand to his mouth to quench the fleshly
smart,
And he tasted the flesh of the Serpent and the blood of
Fafnir's Heart :
Then there came a change upon him, for the speech of
fowl he knew,
And wise in the ways of the beast-kind as the Dwarfs of
old he grew ;

And he knitted his brows and hearkened, and wrath in
his heart arose;
For he felt beset of evil in a world of many foes.
But the hilts of the Wrath he handled, and Regin's heart
he saw,
And how that the Foe of the Gods the net of death would
draw;
And his bright eyes flashed and sparkled, and his mouth
grew set and stern,
As he hearkened the voice of the eagles, and their song
began to learn.

For the first cried out in the desert: "O mighty Sig-
mund's son,
How long wilt thou sit and tarry now the dear-bought
roast is done?"

And the second: "Volsung arise! for the horns blow up
to the hall,
And dight are the purple hangings, and the King to the
feasting should fall."

And the third: "How great is the feast if the eater eat
aright
The Heart of the wisdom of old and the after-world's
delight!"

And the fourth: "Yea, what of Regin? shall he scatter
wrack o'er the world?
Shall the father be slain by the son, and the brother
'gainst brother be hurled?"

And the fifth: "He hath taught a stripling the gifts of a
God to give:
He hath reared up a King for the slaying, that he alone
might live."

And the sixth: "He shall waken mighty as a God that
scorneth at truth;
He hath drunk of the blood of the Serpent, and drowned
all hope and ruth."

And the seventh: "Arise, O Sigurd, lest the hour be
overlate!

For the sun in the mid-noon shineth, and swift is the
 hand of Fate:
 Arise! lest the world run backward and the blind heart
 have its will,
 And once again be tangled the sundered good and ill;
 Lest love and hatred perish, lest the world forget its
 tale,
 And the Gods sit deedless, dreaming, in the high-walled
 heavenly vale."

Then swift ariseth Sigurd, and the Wrath in his hand is
 bare,
 And he looketh, and Regin sleepeth, and his eyes wide-
 open glare;
 But his lips smile false in his dreaming, and his hand is
 on the sword;
 For he dreams himself the Master and the new world's
 fashioning-lord.
 And his dream hath forgotten Sigurd, and the King's life
 lies in the pit;
 He is nought; Death gnaweth upon him, while the Dwarfs
 in mastery sit.

But lo, how the eyes of Sigurd the heart of the guileful
 behold,
 And great is Allfather Odin, and upriseth the Curse of
 the Gold,
 And the Branstock bloometh to heaven from the ancient
 wondrous root;
 The summer hath shone on its blossoms, and Sigurd's
 Wrath is the fruit:
 Dread then he cried in the desert: "Guile-master, lo thy
 deed!
 Hast thou nurst my life for destruction, and my death to
 serve thy need?
 Hast thou kept me here for the net and the death that
 tame things die?
 Hast thou feared me overmuch, thou Foe of the Gods on
 high?
 Lest the sword thine hand was wielding should turn
 about and cleave
 The tangled web of nothing thou hadst wearied thyself to
 weave.

Lo here the sword and the stroke ! judge the Norns be-
twixt us twain !
But for me, I will live and die not, nor shall all my hope
be vain."

Then his second stroke struck Sigurd, for the Wrath
flashed thin and white,
And 'twixt head and trunk of Regin fierce ran the fateful
light;
And there lay brother by brother a faded thing and
wan.
But Sigurd cried in the desert: "So far have I wended
on !
Dead are the foes of God-home that would blend the good
and the ill ;
And the World shall yet be famous, and the Gods shall
have their will.
Nor shall I be dead and forgotten, while the earth grows
worse and worse,
With the blind heart King o'er the people, and binding
curse with curse."

HOW SIGURD TOOK TO HIM THE TREASURE OF THE
ELF ANDVARI.

Now Sigurd eats of the Heart that once in the Dwarf-
king lay,
The hoard of the wisdom begrudged, the might of the
earlier day.
Then wise of heart was he waxen, but longing in him
grew
To sow the seed he had gotten, and till the field he
knew.
So he leapeth aback of Greyfell, and rideth the desert
bare,
And the hollow slot of Fafnir, that led to the Serpent's
lair.
Then long he rode adown it, and the ernes flew overhead,
And tidings great and glorious of that Treasure of old
they said.
So far o'er the waste he wended, and when the night was
some

He saw the earth-old dwelling, the dread Gold-wallower's
home:
On the skirts of the Heath it was builded by a tumbled
stony bent;
High went that house to the heavens, down 'neath the
earth it went,
Of unwrought iron fashioned for the heart of a greedy
King:
'T was a mountain, blind without, and within was its
plenishing
But the Hoard of Andvari the ancient, and the sleeping
Curse unseen,
The Gold of the Gods that spared not and the greedy that
have been.

Through the door strode Sigurd the Volsung, and the
grey moon and the sword
Fell in on the tawny gold-heaps of the ancient hapless
Hoard:
Gold gear of hosts unburied, and the coin of cities dead,
Great spoil of the ages of battle, lay there on the Serpent's
bed:
Huge blocks from mid-earth quarried, where none but the
Dwarfs have mined,
Wide sands of the golden rivers no foot of man may
find
Lay 'neath the spoils of the mighty and the ruddy rings
of yore:
But amidst was the Helm of Aweing that the Fear of
earth-folk bore,
And there gleamed a wonder beside it, the Hauberk all
of gold,
Whose like is not in the heavens nor has earth of its
fellow told:
There Sigurd seeth moreover Andvari's Ring of Gain,
The hope of Loki's finger, the Ransom's utmost grain;
For it shone on the midmost gold-heap like the first star
set in the sky
In the yellow space of even when moon-rise draweth
anigh.
Then laughed the Son of Sigmund, and stooped to the
golden land,

And gathered that first of the harvest and set it on his hand;
And he did on the Helm of Aweing, and the Hauberk all of gold,
Whose like is not in the heavens nor has earth of its fellow told:
Then he praised the day of the Volsungs amid the yellow light,
And he set his hand to the labour and put forth his kingly might;
He dragged forth gold to the moon, on the desert's face he laid
The innermost earth's adornment, and rings for the nameless made;
He toiled and loaded Greyfell, and the cloudy war-steed shone
And the gear of Sigurd rattled in the flood of moonlight wan;
There he toiled and loaded Greyfell, and the Volsung's armour rang
Mid the yellow bed of the Serpent: but without the eagles sang:

“Bind the red rings, O Sigurd! Let the gold shine free and clear!
For what hath the Son of the Volsungs the ancient Curse to fear?”

“Bind the red rings, O Sigurd! for thy tale is well begun,
And the world shall be good and gladdened by the Gold lit up by the sun.”

“Bind the red rings, O Sigurd, and gladden all thine heart!
For the world shall make thee merry ere thou and she depart.”

“Bind the red rings, O Sigurd! for the ways go green below,
Go green to the dwelling of Kings, and the halls that the Queen-folk know.”

“Bind the red rings, O Sigurd! for what is there bides by the way,

Save the joy of folk to awaken, and the dawn of the merry day ? ”

“ Bind the red rings, O Sigurd ! for the strife awaits thine hand,
And a plenteous war-field’s reaping, and the praise of many a land.”

“ Bind the red rings, O Sigurd ! But how shall store-house hold
That glory of thy winning and the tidings to be told ? ”

Now the moon was dead, and the star-worlds were great
on the heavenly plain,
When the steed was fully laden ; then Sigurd taketh the rein
And turns to the ruined rock-wall that the lair was built
beneath,
For there he deemed was the gate and the door of the
Glittering Heath,
But not a whit moved Greyfell for ought that the King
might do ;
Then Sigurd pondered awhile, till the heart of the beast
he knew,
And clad in all his war-gear he leaped to the saddle-stead,
And with pride and mirth neighed Greyfell and tossed
aloft his head,
And sprang unspurred o’er the waste, and light and swift
he went,
And breasted the broken rampart, the stony tumbled
bent ;
And over the brow he clomb, and there beyond was the
world,
A place of many mountains and great crags together
hurled.
So down to the west he wendeth, and goeth swift and
light,
And the stars are beginning to wane, and the day is
mingled with night ;
For full fain was the sun to arise and look on the Gold
set free,
And the Dwarf-wrought rings of the Treasure and the
gifts from the floor of the sea.

HOW SIGURD AWOKE BRYNHILD UPON HINDFELL.²⁸

By long roads rideth Sigurd amidst that world of stone,
And somewhat south he turneth; for he would not be
alone,
But longs for the dwellings of man-folk, and the kingly
people's speech,
And the days of the glee and the joyance, where men
laugh each to each.
But still the desert endureth, and afar must Greyfell
fare
From the wrack of the Glittering Heath, and Fafnir's
golden lair.
Long Sigurd rideth the waste, when, lo, on a morning of
day
From out of the tangled crag-walls, amidst the cloud-land
grey
Comes up a mighty mountain, and it is as though there
burns
A torch amidst of its cloud-wreath; so thither Sigurd
turns,
For he deems indeed from its topmost to look on the best
of the earth;
And Greyfell neigheth beneath him, and his heart is full
of mirth.

So he rideth higher and higher, and the light grows great
and strange,
And forth from the clouds it flickers, till at noon they
gather and change,
And settle thick on the mountain, and hide its head from
sight;
But the winds in a while are awakened, and day bettereth
ere the night,
And, lifted a measureless mass o'er the desert crag-walls
high,
Cloudless the mountain riseth against the sunset sky,
The sea of the sun grown golden, as it ebbs from the day's
desire;
And the light that afar was a torch is grown a river of
fire,

And the mountain is black above it, and below is it dark
and dun;
And there is the head of Hindfell as an island in the sun.

Night falls, but yet rides Sigurd, and hath no thought of
rest,

For he longs to climb that rock-world and behold the
earth at its best;

But now mid the maze of the foot-hills he seeth the light
no more,

And the stars are lovely and gleaming on the lightless
heavenly floor.

So up and up he wendeth till the night is wearing thin;
And he rideth a rift of the mountain, and all is dark
therein,

Till the stars are dimmed by dawning and the wakening
world is cold;

Then afar in the upper rock-wall a breach doth he behold,
And a flood of light poured inward the doubtful dawning
blinds:

So swift he rideth thither and the mouth of the breach he
finds,

And sitteth awhile on Greyfell on the marvellous thing to
gaze:

For lo, the side of Hindfell enwrapped by the fervent
blaze,

And nought 'twixt earth and heaven save a world of
flickering flame,

And a hurrying shifting tangle, where the dark rents
went and came.

Great groweth the heart of Sigurd with uttermost desire,
And he crieth kind to Greyfell, and they hasten up, and
nigher,

Till he draweth rein in the dawning on the face of Hind-
fell's steep:

But who shall heed the dawning where the tongues of
that wildfire leap?

For they weave a wavering wall, that driveth over the
heaven

The wind that is born within it; nor ever aside is it driven
By the mightiest wind of the waste, and the rain-flood
amidst it is nought;

And no wayfarer's door and no window the hand of its
builder hath wrought.
But thereon is the Volsung smiling as its breath uplifteth
his hair,
And his eyes shine bright with its image, and his mail
gleams white and fair,
And his war-helm pictures the heavens and the waning
stars behind:
But his neck is Greyfell stretching to snuff at the flame-
wall blind,
And his cloudy flank upheaveth, and tinkleth the knitted
mail,
And the gold of the uttermost waters is waxen wan and
pale.

Now Sigurd turns in his saddle, and the hilt of the Wrath
he shifts,
And draws a girth the tighter; then the gathered reins
he lifts,
And crieth aloud to Greyfell, and rides at the wildfire's
heart;
But the white wall wavers before him and the flame-flood
rusheth apart,
And high o'er his head it riseth, and wide and wild is its
roar
As it beareth the mighty tidings to the very heavenly
floor:
But he rideth through its roaring as the warrior rides the
rye,
When it bows with the wind of the summer and the hid
spears draw anigh;
The white flame licks his raiment and sweeps through
Greyfell's mane,
And bathes both hands of Sigurd and the hilts of Fafnir's
bane,
And winds about his war-helm and mingles with his
hair,
But nought his raiment dusketh or dims his glittering
gear;
Then it fails and fades and darkens till all seems left
behind,
And dawn and the blaze are swallowed in mid-mirk stark
and blind.

But forth a little further and a little further on
And all is calm about him, and he sees the scorched earth
wan
Beneath a glimmering twilight, and he turns his conquer-
ing eyes,
And a ring of pale slaked ashes on the side of Hindfell
lies;
And the world of the waste is beyond it; and all is
hushed and grey,
And the new-risen moon is a-paling, and the stars grow
faint with day.
Then Sigurd looked before him and a Shield-burg there
he saw,
A wall of the tiles of Odin wrought clear without a flaw,
The gold by the silver gleaming, and the ruddy by the
white;
And the blazonings of their glory were done upon them
bright,
As of dear things wrought for the war-lords new come to
Odin's hall.
Piled high aloft to the heavens uprose that battle-wall,
And far o'er the topmost shield-rim for a banner of fame
there hung
A glorious golden buckler; and against the staff it rung
As the earliest wind of dawning uprose on Hindfell's
face
And the light from the yellowing east beamed soft on
the shielded place.

But the Wrath cried out in answer as Sigurd leapt adown
To the wasted soil of the desert by that rampart of
renown;
He looked but little beneath it, and the dwelling of God
it seemed,
As against its gleaming silence the eager Sigurd gleamed:
He draweth not sword from scabbard, as the wall he
wendeth around,
And it is but the wind and Sigurd that wakeneth any
sound:
But, lo, to the gate he cometh, and the doors are open
wide,
And no warder the way withstandeth, and no earls by the
threshold abide;

So he stands awhile and marvels ; then the baleful light
of the Wrath
Gleams bare in his ready hand as he wendeth the inward
path :
For he doubted some guile of the Gods, or perchance
some Dwarf-king's snare,
Or a mock of the Giant people that shall fade in the
morning air :
But he getteth him in and gazeth ; and a wall doth he
behold,
And the ruddy set by the white, and the silver by the
gold ;
But within the garth that it girdeth no work of man is set,
But the utmost head of Hindfell ariseth higher yet ;
And below in the very midmost is a Giant-fashioned
mound,
Piled high as the rims of the Shield-burg above the level
ground ;
And there, on that mound of the Giants, o'er the wilder-
ness forlorn,
A pale grey image lieth, and gleameth in the morn.

So there was Sigurd alone ; and he went from the shielded
door,
And aloft in the desert of wonder the Light of the Bran-
stock he bore ;
And he set his face to the earth-mound, and beheld the
image wan,
And the dawn was growing about it ; and, lo, the shape of
a man
Set forth to the eyeless desert on the tower-top of the
world,
High over the cloud-wrought castle whence the windy
bolts are hurled.

Now he comes to the mound and climbs it, and will see
if the man be dead ;
Some King of the days forgotten laid there with crownèd
head,
Or the frame of a God, it may be, that in heaven hath
changed his life,
Or some glorious heart belovèd, God-rapt from the earthly
strife :

Now over the body he standeth, and seeth it shapen fair,
And clad from head to foot-sole in pale grey-glittering
gear,
In a hauberk wrought as straitly as though to the flesh it
were grown :
But a great helm hideth the head and is girt with a glit-
tering crown.

So thereby he stoopeth and kneeleth, for he deems it
were good indeed
If the breath of life abide there and the speech to help at
need ;
And as sweet as the summer wind from a garden under
the sun
Cometh forth on the topmost Hindfell the breath of that
sleeping-one.
Then he saith he will look on the face, if it bear him
love or hate,
Or the bonds for his life's constraining, or the sundering
doom of fate.
So he draweth the helm from the head, and, lo, the brow
snow-white,
And the smooth unfurrowed cheeks, and the wise lips
breathing light ;
And the face of a woman it is, and the fairest that ever
was born,
Shone forth to the empty heavens and the desert world
forlorn :
But he looketh, and loveth her sore, and he longeth her
spirit to move,
And awaken her heart to the world, that she may behold
him and love.
And he toucheth her breast and her hands, and he loveth
her passing sore ;
And he saith : " Awake ! I am Sigurd ; " but she moveth
never the more.

Then he looked on his bare bright blade, and he said :
" Thou — what wilt thou do ?
For indeed as I came by the war-garth thy voice of desire
I knew."
Bright burnt the pale blue edges, for the sunrise drew
anear,

And the rims of the Shield-burg glittered, and the east
was exceeding clear :

So the eager edges he setteth to the Dwarf-wrought battle-
coat

Where the hammered ring-knit collar constraineth the
woman's throat ;

But the sharp Wrath biteth and rendeth, and before it
fail the rings,

And, lo, the gleam of the linen, and the light of golden
things :

Then he driveth the blue steel onward, and through the
skirt, and out,

Till nought but the rippling linen is wrapping her about ;

Then he deems her breath comes quicker and her breast
begins to heave,

So he turns about the War-Flame and rends down either
sleeve,

Till her arms lie white in her raiment, and a river of sun-
bright hair

Flows free o'er bosom and shoulder and floods the desert
bare.

Then a flush cometh over her visage and a sigh up-
heaveth her breast,

And her eyelids quiver and open, and she wakeneth into
rest ;

Wide-eyed on the dawning she gazeth, too glad to change
or smile,

And but little moveth her body, nor speaketh she yet for
a while ;

And yet kneels Sigurd moveless her wakening speech to
heed,

While soft the waves of the daylight o'er the starless
heavens speed ;

And the gleaming rims of the Shield-burg yet bright and
brighter grow,

And the thin moon hangeth her horns dead-white in the
golden glow.

Then she turned and gazed on Sigurd, and her eyes met
the Volsung's eyes,

And mighty and measureless now did the tide of his love
arise,

For their longing had met and mingled, and he knew of
her heart that she loved,
As she spake unto nothing but him and her lips with the
speech-flood moved :

“O, what is the thing so mighty that my weary sleep
hath torn,
And rent the fallow bondage, and the wan woe over-
worn ? ”

He said : “ The hand of Sigurd and the Sword of Sig-
mund’s son,
And the heart that the Volsungs fashioned this deed for
thee have done.”

But she said : “ Where then is Odin that laid me here
alow ?
Long lasteth the grief of the world, and man-folk’s tan-
gled woe ! ”

“ He dwelleth above,” said Sigurd, “ but I on the earth
abide,
And I came from the Glittering Heath the waves of thy
fire to ride.”

But therewith the sun rose upward and lightened all the
earth,
And the light flashed up to the heavens from the rims of
the glorious girth ;
But they twain arose together, and with both her palms
outspread,
And bathed in the light returning, she cried aloud and
said :

“ All hail, O Day and thy Sons, and thy kin of the col-
oured things !
Hail, following Night, and thy Daughter that leadeth thy
wavering wings !
Look down with unangry eyes on us to-day alive,
And give us the hearts victorious, and the gain for which
we strive !
All hail, ye Lords of God-home, and ye Queens of the
House of Gold !

Hail, thou dear Earth that bearest, and thou Wealth of
field and fold !
Give us, your noble children, the glory of wisdom and
speech,
And the hearts and the hands of healing, and the mouths
and hands that teach ! ”

Then they turned and were knit together ; and oft and
o'er again
They craved, and kissed rejoicing, and their hearts were
full and fain.

Then Sigurd looketh upon her, and the words from his
heart arise :
“Thou art the fairest of earth, and the wisest of the wise ;
O who art thou that lovest ? I am Sigurd, e'en as I told ;
I have slain the Foe of the Gods, and gotten the Ancient
Gold ;
And great were the gain of thy love, and the gift of mine
earthly days,
If we twain should never sunder as we wend on the
changing ways.
O who art thou that lovest, thou fairest of all things
born ?
And what meaneth thy sleep and thy slumber in the
wilderness forlorn ? ”

She said : “ I am she that loveth : I was born of the
earthly folk,
But of old Allfather took me from the Kings and their
wedding yoke :
And he called me the Victory-Wafer, and I went and
came as he would,
And I chose the slain for his war-host, and the days were
glorious and good,
Till the thoughts of my heart overcame me, and the pride
of my wisdom and speech,
And I scorned the earth-folk's Framer and the Lord of
the world I must teach :
For the death-doomed I caught from the sword, and the
fated life I slew,
And I deemed that my deeds were goodly, and that long
I should do and undo.

But Allfather came against me and the God in his wrath
arose ;
And he cried : 'Thou hast thought in thy folly that the
Gods have friends and foes,
That they wake, and the world wends onward, that they
sleep, and the world slips back,
That they laugh, and the world's weal waxeth, that they
frown and fashion the wrack :
Thou hast cast up the curse against me ; it shall fall
aback on thine head ;
Go back to the sons of repentance, with the children of
sorrow wed !
For the Gods are great unholpen, and their grief is seldom
seen,
And the wrong that they will and must be is soon as it
hath not been.'

"Yet I thought: 'Shall I wed in the world, shall I gather
grief on the earth ?
Then the fearless heart shall I wed, and bring the best to
birth,
And fashion such tales for the telling, that Earth shall
be holpen at least,
If the Gods think scorn of its fairness, as they sit at the
changeless feast.'

"Then somewhat smiled Allfather ; and he spake : 'So
let it be !
The doom thereof abideth ; the doom of me and thee.
Yet long shall the time pass over ere thy waking-day be
born :
Fare forth, and forget and be weary 'neath the Sting of
the Sleepful Thorn !'

"So I came to the head of Hindfell and the ruddy shields
and white,
And the wall of the wildfire wavering around the isle of
night ;
And there the Sleep-thorn pierced me, and the slumber on
me fell,
And the night of nameless sorrows that hath no tale to
tell.

Now I am she that loveth; and the day is nigh at
hand
When I, who have ridden the sea-realm and the regions of
the land,
And dwelt in the measureless mountains and the forge of
stormy days,
Shall dwell in the house of my fathers and the land of the
people's praise;
And there shall hand meet hand, and heart by heart shall
beat,
And the lying-down shall be joyous, and the morn's up-
rising sweet.
Lo now, I look on thine heart and behold of thine inmost
will,
That thou of the days wouldst hearken that our portion
shall fulfil;
But O, be wise of man-folk, and the hope of thine heart
refrain!
As oft in the battle's beginning ye vex the steed with the
rein,
Lest at last in its latter ending, when the sword hath
hushed the horn,
His limbs should be weary and fail, and his might be
over-worn.
O be wise, lest thy love constrain me, and my vision wax
o'er-clear,
And thou ask of the thing that thou shouldst not, and the
thing that thou wouldst not hear.

"Know thou, most mighty of men, that the Norns shall
order all,
And yet without thine helping shall no whit of their will
befall;
Be wise! 't is a marvel of words, and a mock for the fool
and the blind;
But I saw it writ in the heavens, and its fashioning there
did I find:
And the night of the Norns and their slumber, and the
tide when the world runs back,
And the way of the sun is tangled, it is wrought of the
dastard's lack.
But the day when the fair earth blossoms, and the sun is
bright above,

Of the daring deeds is it fashioned and the eager hearts
of love.

“Be wise, and cherish thine hope in the freshness of the
days,
And scatter its seed from thine hand in the field of the
people’s praise;
Then fair shall it fall in the furrow, and some the earth
shall speed,
And the sons of men shall marvel at the blossom of the
deed:
But some the earth shall speed not; nay rather, the wind
of the heaven
Shall waft it away from thy longing — and a gift to the
Gods hast thou given,
And a tree for the roof and the wall in the house of the
hope that shall be,
Though it seemeth our very sorrow, and the grief of thee
and me.

“Strive not with the fools of man-folk: for belike thou
shalt overcome;
And what then is the gain of thine hunting when thou
bearest the quarry home?
Or else shall the fool overcome thee, and what deed thereof
shall grow?
Nay, strive with the wise man rather, and increase thy
woe and his woe;
Yet thereof a gain hast thou gotten; and the half of
thine heart hast thou won
If thou mayst prevail against him, and his deeds are the
deeds thou hast done:
Yea, and if thou fall before him, in him shalt thou live
again,
And thy deeds in his hand shall blossom, and his heart
of thine heart shall be fain.

“When thou hearest the fool rejoicing, and he saith, ‘It
is over and past,
And the wrong was better than right, and hate turns into
love at the last,
And we strove for nothing at all, and the Gods are fallen
asleep;

For so good is the world a-growing that the evil good
shall reap :'
Then loosen thy sword in the scabbard and settle the
helm on thine head,
For men betrayed are mighty, and great are the wrong-
fully dead.

"Wilt thou do the deed and repent it? thou hadst better
never been born :
Wilt thou do the deed and exalt it? then thy fame shall
be outworn :
Thou shalt do the deed and abide it, and sit on thy
throne on high,
And look on to-day and to-morrow as those that never die.

"Love thou the Gods—and withstand them, lest thy
fame should fail in the end,
And thou be but their thrall and their bondsman, who
wert born for their very friend :
For few things from the Gods are hidden, and the hearts
of men they know,
And how that none rejoiceth to quail and crouch alow.

"I have spoken the words, belovèd, to thy matchless
glory and worth ;
But thy heart to my heart hath been speaking, though my
tongue hath set it forth :
For I am she that loveth, and I know what thou wouldst
teach
From the heart of thine unlearned wisdom, and I needs
must speak thy speech."

Then words were weary and silent, but oft and o'er again
They craved and kissed rejoicing, and their hearts were
full and fain.

Then spake the Son of Sigmund : "Fairest, and most of
worth,
Hast thou seen the ways of man-folk and the regions of
the earth ?
Then speak yet more of wisdom ; for most meet meseems
it is
That my soul to thy soul be shapen, and that I should
know thy bliss."

So she took his right hand meekly, nor any word would say,
Not e'en of love or praising, his longing to delay ;
And they sat on the side of Hindfell, and their fain eyes
looked and loved,
As she told of the hidden matters whereby the world is
moved :
And she told of the framing of all things, and the houses
of the heaven ;
And she told of the star-worlds' courses, and how the
winds be driven ;
And she told of the Norns and their names, and the fate
that abideth the earth ;
And she told of the ways of King-folk in their anger and
their mirth ;
And she spake of the love of women, and told of the
flame that burns,
And the fall of mighty houses, and the friend that falters
and turns,
And the lurking blinded vengeance, and the wrong that
amendeth wrong,
And the hand that repenteth its stroke, and the grief
that endureth for long ;
And how man shall bear and forbear, and be master of
all that is ;
And how man shall measure it all, the wrath, and the
grief, and the bliss.

“I saw the body of Wisdom, and of shifting guise was
she wrought,
And I stretched out my hands to hold her, and a mote of
the dust they caught ;
And I prayed her to come for my teaching, and she
came in the midnight dream —
And I woke and might not remember, nor betwixt her
tangle deem :
She spake, and how might I hearken ; I heard, and how
might I know ;
I knew, and how might I fashion, or her hidden glory
show ?
All things I have told thee of Wisdom are but fleeting
images
Of her hosts that abide in the heavens, and her light
that Allfather sees :

Yet wise is the sower that sows, and wise is the reaper
that reaps,
And wise is the smith in his smiting, and wise is the
warder that keeps:
And wise shalt thou be to deliver, and I shall be wise to
desire;
— And lo, the tale that is told, and the sword and the
wakening fire!
Lo now, I am she that loveth, and hark how Greyfell
neighs,
And Fafnir's Bed is gleaming, and green go the down-
ward ways,
The road to the children of men and the deeds that thou
shalt do
In the joy of thy life-days' morning, when thine hope is
fashioned anew.
Come now, O Bane of the Serpent, for now is the high-
noon come,
And the sun hangeth over Hindfell and looks on the
earth-folk's home;
But the soul is so great within thee, and so glorious are
thine eyes,
And me so love constraineth, and mine heart that was
called the wise,
That we twain may see men's dwellings and the house
where we shall dwell,
And the place of our life's beginning, where the tale
shall be to tell."

So they climb the burg of Hindfell, and hand in hand
they fare,
Till all about and above them is nought but the sunlit
air,
And there close they cling together rejoicing in their
mirth;
For far away beneath them lie the kingdoms of the
earth,
And the garths of men-folk's dwellings and the streams
that water them,
And the rich and plenteous acres, and the silver ocean's
hem,
And the woodland wastes and the mountains, and all
that holdeth all;

The house and the ship and the island, the loom and the
mine and the stall,
The beds of bane and healing, the crafts that slay and
save,
The temple of God and the Doom-ring, the cradle and the
grave.

Then spake the Victory-Wafer: "O King of the Earthly
Age,
As a God thou beholdest the treasure and the joy of
thine heritage,
And where on the wings of his hope is the spirit of
Sigurd borne?
Yet I bid thee hover awhile as a lark alow on the corn;
Yet I bid thee look on the land 'twixt the wood and the
silver sea
In the bight of the swirling river, and the house that
cherished me!
There dwelleth mine earthly sister and the King that she
hath wed;
There morn by morn aforetime I woke on the golden
bed;
There eve by eve I tarried mid the speech and the lays of
Kings;
There noon by noon I wandered and plucked the blossom-
ing things;
The little land of Lymdale by the swirling river's side,
Where Brynhild once was I called in the days ere my
father died;
The little land of Lymdale 'twixt the woodland and the
sea,
Where on thee mine eyes shall brighten and thine eyes
shall beam on me."

"I shall seek thee there," said Sigurd, "when the day-
spring is begun,
Ere we wend the world together in the season of the
sun."

"I shall bide thee there," said Brynhild, "till the fulness
of the days,
And the time for the glory appointed, and the springing-
tide of praise."

From his hand then draweth Sigurd Andvari's Ancient
Gold;
There is nought but the sky above them as the ring
together they hold,
The shapen ancient token, that hath no change nor
end,
No change, and no beginning, no flaw for God to mend:
Then Sigurd cries: "O Brynhild, now hearken while I
swear,
That the sun shall die in the heavens and the day no
more be fair,
If I seek not love in Lymdale and the house that fostered
thee,
And the land where thou awakedst 'twixt the woodland
and the sea!"

And she cried: "O Sigurd, Sigurd, now hearken while I
swear
That the day shall die for ever and the sun to blackness
wear,
Ere I forget thee, Sigurd, as I lie 'twixt wood and sea
In the little land of Lymdale and the house that fostered
me!"
Then he set the ring on her finger and once, if ne'er
again,
They kissed and clung together, and their hearts were
full and fain.

So the day grew old about them and the joy of their
desire,
And eve and the sunset came, and faint grew the sunset
fire,
And the shadowless death of the day was sweet in the
golden tide;
But the stars shone forth on the world, and the twilight
changed and died;
And sure if the first of man-folk had been born to that
starry night,
And had heard no tale of the sunrise, he had never longed
for the light;
But Earth longed amidst her slumber, as 'neath the night
she lay,
And fresh and all abundant abode the deeds of Day.

BRYNHILD.

HOW SIGURD MET BRYNHILD IN LYMDALE.²⁹

So there abideth Sigurd with the Lymdale forest-lords
In mighty honour holden, and in love beyond all words,
And thence abroad through the people there goeth a
 rumour and breath
Of the great Gold-wallower's slaying, and the tale of the
 Glittering Heath,
And a word of the Ancient Treasure and Greyfell's gleam-
 ing Load;
And the hearts of men grew eager, and the coming deeds
 abode.
But warily dealeth Sigurd, and he wends in the wood-
 land fray
As one whose heart is ready and abides a better day:
In the woodland fray he fareth, and oft on a day doth
 ride
Where the mighty forest wild-bulls and the lonely wolves
 abide;
For as then no other warfare do the lords of Lymdale
 know,
And the axe-age and the sword-age seem dead a while ago,
And the age of the cleaving of shields, and of brother by
 brother slain,
And the bitter days of the whoredom, and the hardened
 lust of gain;
But man to man may hearken, and he that soweth reaps,
And hushed is the heart of Fenrir in the wolf-den of the
 deeps.

Now is it the summer-season, and Sigurd rideth the land,
And his hound runs light before him, and his hawk sits
 light on his hand,
And all alone on a morning he rides the flowery sward
Betwixt the woodland dwellings and the house of Lym-
 dale's lord;
And he hearkens Greyfell's going as he wends adown the
 lea,

And his heart for love is craving, and the deeds he deems
shall be;
And he hears the Wrath's sheath tinkling as he rides the
daisies down,
And he thinks of his love laid safely in the arms of his
renown.
But lo, as he rides the meadows, before him now he sees
A builded burg arising amid the leafy trees,
And a white-walled house on its topmost with a golden
roof-ridge done,
And thereon the clustering dove-kind in the brightness
of the sun.

So Sigurd stayed to behold it, for the heart within him
laughed,
But e'en then, as the arrow speedeth from the mighty
archer's draught,
Forth fled the falcon unhooded from the hand of Sigurd
the King,
And up, and over the tree-boughs he shot with steady
wing:
Then the Volsung followed his flight, for he looked to
see him fall
On the fluttering folk of the doves, and he cried the
backward call
Full oft and over again; but the falcon heeded it nought,
Nor turned to his kingly wrist-perch, nor the folk of the
pigeons sought,
But flew up to a high-built tower, and sat in the window
a space,
Crying out like the fowl of Odin when the first of the
morning they face,
And then passed through the open casement as an erne
to his eyrie goes.

Much marvelled the Son of Sigmund, and rode to the
fruitful close:
For he said: Here a great one dwelleth, though none
have told me thereof,
And he shall give me my falcon, and his fellowship and
love.
So he came to the gate of the garth, and forth to the
hall-door rode,

And leapt adown from Greyfell, and entered that fair
abode;
For full lovely was it fashioned, and great was the pil-
lared hall,
And fair in its hangings were woven the deeds that
Kings befall,
And the merry sun went through it and gleamed in gold
and horn;
But afield or a-fell are its carles, and none labour there
that morn,
And void it is of the maidens, and they weave in the
bower aloft,
Or they go in the outer gardens 'twixt the rose and the
lily soft:
So saith Sigurd the Volsung, and a door in the corner he
spies
With knots of gold fair-carven, and the graver's mas-
teries:
So he lifts the latch and it opens, and he comes to a
marble stair,
And aloft by the same he goeth through a tower wrought
full fair.
And he comes to a door at its topmost, and lo, a chamber
of Kings
And his falcon there by the window with all unruffled
wings.

But a woman sits on the high-seat with gold about her
head,
And ruddy rings on her arms, and the grace of her
girdle-stead;
And sunlit is her rippled linen, and the green leaves lie
at her feet,
And e'en as a swan on the billow where the firth and the
out-sea meet,
On the dark-blue cloths she sitteth, so fair and softly
made
Are her limbs by the linen hidden, and so white is she
arrayed.
But a web of gold is before her, and therein by her shut-
tle wrought
The early days of the Volsungs and the war by the sea's
rim fought,

And the crowned queen over Sigmund, and the Helper's
pillared hall,
And the golden babe uplifted to the eyes of duke and thrall;
And there was the slender stripling by the knees of the
Dwarf-folk's lord,
And the gift of the ancient Gripir, and the forging of the
Sword;
And there were the coils of Fafnir, and the hooded threat
of death,
And the King by the cooking-fire, and the fowl of the
Glittering Heath;
And there was the headless King-smith and the golden
halls of the Worm,
And the laden Greyfell faring through the land of
perished storm;
And there was the head of Hindfell, and the flames to
the sky-floor driven;
And there was the glittering Shield-burg, and the fallow
bondage riven;
And there was the wakening woman and the golden
Volsung done,
And they twain o'er the earthly kingdoms in the lonely
evening sun:
And there were fells and forests, and towns and tossing
seas,
And the Wrath and the golden Sigurd for ever blent
with these,
In the midst of the battle triumphant, in the midst of the
war-kings' fall,
In the midst of the peace well-conquered, in the midst of
the praising hall.

There Sigurd stood and marvelled, for he saw his deeds
that had been,
And his deeds of the days that should be, fair-wrought in
the golden sheen;
And he looked in the face of the woman, and Brynhild's
eyes he knew,
But still in the door he tarried, and so glad and fair he grew,
That the Gods laughed out in the heavens to see the
Volsung's seed;
And the breeze blew in from the summer and over Bryn-
hild's weed,

Till his heart so swelled with the sweetness that the fair
word stayed in his mouth,
And a marvel beloved he seemeth, as a ship new-come
from the south:
And still she longed and beheld him, nor foot nor hand
she moved
As she marvelled at her gladness, and her love so well
beloved.

But at last through the sounds of summer the voice of
Sigurd came,
And it seemed as a silver trumpet from the house of the
fateful fame;
And he spake: "Hail, lady and queen! Hail, fairest of
all the earth!
Is it well with the hap of thy life-days, and thy kin and
the house of thy birth?"

She said: "My kin is joyous, and my house is blooming
fair,
And dead, both root and branches, is the tree of their
travail and care."

He spake: "I have longed, I have wondered if thy heart
were well at ease,
If the hope of thy days had blossomed and borne thee
fair increase."

"O have thou thanks," said Brynhild, "for thine heart
that speaketh kind!
Yea, the hope of my days is accomplished, and no more
there is to find."

And again she spake in a space: "The road hath been
weary and long,
But well hast thou ridden it, Sigurd, and the sons of God
are strong."

He said: "I have sought, O Brynhild, and found the
heart of thine home;
And no man hath asked or holpen, and all unbidden I
come."

She said: "O welcome hither! for the heart of the King
I knew,
And thine hope that overcometh, and thy will that nought
shall undo."

"Unbidden I came," he answered, "yet it is but a little
space
Since I heard thy voice on the mountain, and thy kind
lips cherished my face."

She rose from the dark-blue raiment, and trembling there
she stood,
And no word her lips had gotten that her heart might
deem it good:
And his heart went forth to meet her, yet nought he
moved for a while,
Until the God-kin's laughter brake blooming from a
smile
And he cried: "It is good, O Brynhild, that we draw
exceeding near,
Lest Odin mock Kings' children that the doom of fate
they fear."

Then forth she stepped from the high-seat, and forth from
the threshold he came,
Till both their bodies mingling seemed one glory and the
same,
And far o'er all fulfilment did the souls within them
long,
As at breast and at lips of the faithful the earthly love
strained strong;
And fresh from the deeps of the summer the breeze across
them blew,
But nought of the earth's desire, or the lapse of time they
knew.

Then apart, but exceeding nigh, for a little while they
stand,
Till Brynhild toucheth her lord, and taketh his hand in
her hand,
And she leadeth him through the chamber, and sitteth
down in her seat;
And him she setteth beside her, and she saith:

“It is right and meet
That thou sit in this throne of my fathers, since thy gift
to-day I have :
Thou hast given it altogether, nor ought from me wouldst
save ;
And thou knowest the tale of women, how oft it haps on
a day
That of such gifts men repent them, and their lives are
cast away.”

He said : “I have cast it away as the tiller casteth the
seed,
That the summer may better the spring-tide, and the
autumn winter’s need :
For what were the fruit of our lives if apart they needs
must pass,
And men shall say hereafter : Woe worth the hope that
was ! ”

She said : “That day shall dawn the best of all earthly
days
When we sit, we twain, in the high-seat in the hall of the
people’s praise :
Or else, what fruit of our life-days, what fruit of our
death shall be ?
What fruit, save men’s remembrance of the grief of thee
and me ? ”

He said : “It is sharper to bear than the bitter sword in
the breast.
O woe, to think of it now in the days of our gleaning of
rest ! ”

Said Brynhild : “I bid thee remember the word that I
have sworn,
How the sun shall turn to blackness, and the last day be
outworn
Ere I forget thee, Sigurd, and the kindness of thy face.”

And they kissed and the day grew later and noon failed
the golden place.
But Sigurd said : “O Brynhild, remember how I swore
That the sun should die in the heavens and day come
back no more,

Ere I forget thy wisdom and thine heart of inmost love.
Lo now, shall I unsay it, though the Gods be great
 above,
Though my life should last for ever, though I die to-mor-
 row morn,
Though I win the realm of the world, though I sink to
the thrall-folk's scorn?"

She said: "Thou shalt never unsay it, and thy heart is
mine indeed:
Thou shalt bear my love in thy bosom as thou helpest the
earth-folk's need:
Thou shalt wake to it dawning by dawning; thou shalt
sleep and it shall not be strange:
There is none shall thrust between us till our earthly lives
shall change.
Ah, my love shall fare as a banner in the hand of thy
renown,
In the arms of thy fame accomplished shall it lie when
we lay us adown.
O deathless fame of Sigurd! O glory of my lord!
O birth of the happy Brynhild to the measureless re-
ward!"

So they sat as the day grew dimmer, and they looked on
days to come,
And the fair tale speeding onward, and the glories of their
home;
And they saw their crownèd children and the kindred of
the Kings,
And deeds in the world arising and the day of better
things:
All the earthly exaltation, till their pomp of life should
be passed,
And soft on the bosom of God their love should be laid
at the last.

But when words have a long while failed them, and the
night is nigh at hand,
They arise in the golden glimmer, and apart and anigh
they stand:
Then Brynhild stooped to the Wrath, and touched the
hilts of the sword,

Ere she wound her arms round Sigurd and cherished the
lips of her lord:
Then sweet were the tears of Brynhild, and fast and fast
they fell,
And the love that Sigurd uttered, what speech of song
may tell?

But he turned and departed from her, and her feet on the
threshold abode
As he went through the pillared feast-hall, and forth to
the night he rode:
So he turned toward the dwelling of Heimir, and his love
and his fame seemed one,
And all full-well accomplished, what deeds soe'er were
done;
And the love that endureth for ever, and the endless hope
he bore,
As he faced the change of heaven and the chance of
worldly war.

OF THE PASSING AWAY OF BRYNHILD.³⁰

Once more on the morrow-morning fair shineth the glori-
ous sun,
And the Niblung children labour on a deed that shall be
done.
For out in the people's meadows they raise a bale on
high,
The oak and the ash together, and thereon shall the
Mighty lie;
Nor gold nor steel shall be lacking, nor savour of sweet
spice,
Nor cloths in the Southlands woven, nor webs of untold
price:
The work grows, toil is as nothing; long blasts of the
mighty horn
From the topmost tower out-wailing o'er the woeful
world are borne.

But Brynhild lay in her chamber, and her women went
and came,
And they feared and trembled before her, and none spake
Sigurd's name;

But whiles they deemed her weeping, and whiles they
deemed indeed

That she spake, if they might but hearken, but no words
their ears might heed ;

Till at last she spake out clearly :

“ I know not what ye would ;

For ye come and go in my chamber, and ye seem of
wavering mood

To thrust me on, or to stay me ; to help my heart in woe,
Or to bid my days of sorrow midst nameless folly go.”

None answered the word of Brynhild, none knew of her
intent ;

But she spake : “ Bid hither Gunnar, lest the sun sink
o’er the bent,

And leave the words unspoken I yet have will to speak.”

Then her maidens go from before her, and that lord of
war they seek,

And he stands by the bed of Brynhild and strives to en-
treat and beseech,

But her eyes gaze awfully on him, and his lips may learn
no speech.

And she saith :

“ I slept in the morning, or I dreamed in
the waking-hour,

And my dream was of thee, O Gunnar, and the bed in thy
kingly bower,

And the house that I blessed in my sorrow, and cursed
in my sorrow and shame,

The gates of an ancient people, the towers of a mighty
name :

King, cold was the hall I have dwelt in, and no brand
burned on the hearth ;

Dead-cold was thy bed, O Gunnar, and thy land was
parched with dearth :

But I saw a great King riding, and a master of the harp,
And he rode amidst the foemen, and the swords were

bitter-sharp,

But his hand in the hand-gyves smote not, and his feet
in the fetters were fast,

While many a word of mocking at his speechless face was
cast.

Then I heard a voice in the world: 'O woe for the broken
troth,
And the heavy Need of the Niblungs, and the Sorrow of
Odin the Goth!
Then I saw the halls of the strangers, and the hills, and
the dark-blue sea,
Nor knew of their names and their nations, for earth was
afar from me,
But brother rose up against brother, and blood swam over
the board,
And women smote and spared not, and the fire was mas-
ter and lord.
Then, then was the moonless mid-mirk, and I woke to the
day and the deed,
The deed that earth shall name not, the day of its bitter-
est need.
Many words have I said in my life-days, and little more
shall I say:
Ye have heard the dream of a woman, deal with it as ye
may:
For meseems the world-ways sunder, and the dusk and
the dark is mine,
Till I come to the hall of Freyia, where the deeds of the
Mighty shall shine.'"

So hearkened Gunnar the Niblung, that her words he
understood,
And he knew she was set on the death-stroke, and he
deemed it nothing good:
But he said: "I have hearkened, and heeded thy death
and mine in thy words:
I have done the deed and abide it, and my face shall
laugh on the swords;
But thee, woman, I bid thee abide here till thy grief of
soul abate;
Meseems nought lowly nor shameful shall be the Nib-
lung fate;
And here shalt thou rule and be mighty, and be Queen of
the measureless Gold,
And abase the Kings and upraise them; and anew shall
thy fame be told,
And as fair shall thy glory blossom as the fresh fields
under the spring."

Then he casteth his arms about her, and hot is the heart
of the King
For the glory of Queen Brynhild and the hope of her
days of gain,
And he clean forgetteth Sigurd and the foster-brother
slain :
But she shrank aback from before him, and cried : " Woe
worth the while
For the thoughts ye drive back on me, and the memory
of your guile !
The Kings of Earth were gathered; the wise of men were
met ;
On the death of a woman's pleasure their glorious hearts
were set,
And I was alone amidst them — Ah, hold thy peace hereof!
Lest the thought of the bitterest hours this little hour
should move."

He rose abashed from before her, and yet he lingered
there ;
Then she said : " O King of the Niblungs, what noise do
I hearken and hear ?
Why ring the axes and hammers, while feet of men go
past,
And shields from the wall are shaken, and swords on the
pavement cast,
And the door of the treasure is opened, and the horn
cries loud and long,
And the feet of the Niblung children to the people's
meadows throng ? "

His face was troubled before her, and again she spake
and said :
" Meseemeth this is the hour when men array the dead ;
Wilt thou tell me tidings, Gunnar, that the children of
thy folk
Pile up the bale for Guttorm, and the hand that smote
the stroke ? "

He said : " It is not so, Brynhild ; for that Giuki's son
was burned
When the moon of the middle heaven last night toward
dawning turned."

They looked on each other and spake not; but Gunnar
gat him gone,
And came to his brother Hogni, the wise-heart Giuki's son,
And spake: "Thou art wise, O Hogni; go in to Brynhild
the Queen,
And stay her swift departing; or the last of her days
hath she seen."

"It is nought, thy word," said Hogni; "wilt thou bring
dead men aback,
Or the souls of Kings departed midst the battle and the
wrack?
Yet this shall be easier to thee than the turning Bryn-
hild's heart;
She came to dwell among us, but in us she had no part;
Let her go her ways from the Niblungs with her hand in
Sigurd's hand.
Will the grass grow up henceforward where her feet have
trodden the land?"

"O evil day," said Gunnar, "when my Queen must per-
ish and die!"

"Such oft betide," saith Hogni, "as the lives of men
flit by;
But the evil day is a day, and on each day groweth a
deed,
And a thing that never dieth; and the fateful tale shall
speed.
Lo now, let us harden our hearts and set our brows as
the brass,
Lest men say it, 'They loathed the evil and they brought
the evil to pass.'"

So they spake, and their hearts were heavy, and they
longed for the morrow morn,
And the morrow of to-morrow, and the new day yet to be
born.

But Brynhild cried to her maidens: "Now open ark and
chest,
And draw forth queenly raiment of the loveliest and the
best,

Red rings that the Dwarf-lords fashioned, fair cloths
that the Queens have sewed
To array the bride for the mighty, and the traveller for
the road."

They wept as they wrought her bidding and did on her
goodliest gear;
But she laughed mid the dainty linen, and the gold-rings
fashioned fair:
She arose from the bed of the Niblungs, and her face no
more was wan;
As a star in the dawn-tide heavens, mid the dusky house
she shone:
And they that stood about her, their hearts were raised
aloft
Amid their fear and wonder: then she spake them kind
and soft:

"Now give me the sword, O maidens, wherewith I
sheared the wind
When the Kings of Earth were gathered to know the
Chooser's mind."

All sheathed the maidens brought it, and feared the hid-
den blade,
But the naked blue-white edges across her knees she laid,
And spake: "The heaped-up riches, the gear my fathers
left,
All dear-bought woven wonders, all rings from battle reft,
All goods of men desired, now strew them on the floor,
And so share among you, maidens, the gifts of Brynhild's
store."

They brought them mid their weeping, but none put forth
a hand
To take that wealth desired, the spoils of many a land:
There they stand and weep before her, and some are
moved to speech,
And they cast their arms about her and strive with her,
and beseech
That she look on her loved-ones' sorrow and the glory
of the day.
It was nought; she scarce might see them, and she put
their hands away

And she said: "Peace, ye that love me! and take the
gifts and the gold
In remembrance of my fathers and the faithful deeds of
old."

Then she spake: "Where now is Gunnar, that I may
speak with him?
For new things are mine eyes beholding and the Niblung
house grows dim,
And new sounds gather about me that may hinder me to
speak
When the breath is near to flitting, and the voice is
waxen weak."

Then upright by the bed of the Niblungs for a moment
doth she stand,
And the blade flasheth bright in the chamber, but no
more they hinder her hand
Than if a God were smiting to rend the world in two:
Then dulled are the glittering edges, and the bitter point
cleaves through
The breast of the all-wise Brynhild, and her feet from the
pavement fail,
And the sigh of her heart is hearkened mid the hush of
the maidens' wail.
Chill, deep is the fear upon them, but they bring her
aback to the bed,
And her hand is yet on the hilts, and sidelong droopeth
her head.

Then there cometh a cry from withoutward, and Gunnar's
hurrying feet
Are swift on the kingly threshold, and Brynhild's blood
they meet.
Low down o'er the bed he hangeth and harkeneth for her
word,
And her heavy lids are opened to look on the Niblung lord,
And she saith:

"I pray thee a prayer, the last word in
the world I speak,
That ye bear me forth to Sigurd, and the hand my hand
would seek;
The bale for the dead is builded, it is wrought full wide
on the plain,

It is raised for Earth's best Helper, and thereon is room
for twain :

Ye have hung the shields about it, and the Southland
hangings spread,

There lay me adown by Sigurd and my head beside his
head :

But ere ye leave us sleeping, draw his Wrath from out
the sheath,

And lay that Light of the Branstock, and the blade that
frighted death

Betwixt my side and Sigurd's, as it lay that while ago,
When once in one bed together we twain were laid
alone :

How then when the flames flare upward may I be left
behind ?

How then may the road he wendeth be hard for my feet
to find ?

How then in the gates of Valhall may the door of the
gleaming ring

Clash to on the heel of Sigurd, as I follow on my King ?”

Then she raised herself on her elbow, but again her eye-
lids sank,

And the wound by the sword-edge whispered, as her heart
from the iron shrank,

And she moaned : “O lives of man-folk, for unrest all
overlong

By the Father were ye fashioned ; and what hope amend-
eth wrong ?

Now at last, O my beloved, all is gone ; none else is near,
Through the ages of all ages, never sundered, shall we
wear.”

Scarce more than a sigh was the word, as back on the bed
she fell,

Nor was there need in the chamber of the passing of
Brynhild to tell ;

And no more their lamentation might the maidens hold
aback,

But the sound of their bitter mourning was as if red-
handed wrack

Ran wild in the Burg of the Niblungs, and the fire were
master of all.

Then the voice of Gunnar the war-king cried out o'er the weeping hall:

“Wail on, O women forsaken, for the mightiest woman born!

Now the hearth is cold and joyless, and the waste bed lieth forlorn.

Wail on, but amid your weeping lay hand to the glorious dead,

That not alone for an hour may lie Queen Brynhild's head:

For here have been heavy tidings, and the Mightiest under shield

Is laid on the bale high-built in the Niblungs' hallowed field.

Fare forth! for he abideth, and we do Allfather wrong,
If the shining Valhall's pavement await their feet o'erlong.”

Then they took the body of Brynhild in the raiment that she wore,

And out through the gate of the Niblungs the holy corpse they bore,

And thence forth to the mead of the people, and the high-built shielded bale:

Then afresh in the open meadows breaks forth the women's wail

When they see the bed of Sigurd and the glittering of his gear;

And fresh is the wail of the people as Brynhild draweth anear,

And the tidings go before her that for twain the bale is built,

That for twain is the oak-wood shielded and the pleasant odours spilt.

There is peace on the bale of Sigurd, and the Gods look down from on high,

And they see the lids of the Volsung close shut against the sky.

As he lies with his shield beside him in the Hauberk all of gold,

That has not its like in the heavens, nor has earth of its fellow told;

And forth from the Helm of Aweing are the sunbeams
flashing wide,
And the sheathèd Wrath of Sigurd lies still by his mighty
side.

Then cometh an elder of days, a man of the ancient times,
Who is long past sorrow and joy, and the steep of the
bale he climbs;

And he kneeleth down by Sigurd, and bareth the Wrath
to the sun

That the beams are gathered about it, and from hilt to
blood-point run,

And wide o'er the plain of the Niblungs doth the Light
of the Branstock glare,

Till the wondering mountain-shepherds on that star of
noontide stare,

And fear for many an evil; but the ancient man stands
still

With the war-flame on his shoulder, nor thinks of good
or of ill,

Till the feet of Brynhild's bearers on the topmost bale are
laid,

And her bed is dight by Sigurd's; then he sinks the pale
white blade

And lays it 'twixt the sleepers, and leaves them there
alone —

He, the last that shall ever behold them, — and his days
are well-nigh done.

Then is silence over the plain; in the noon shine the
torches pale

As the best of the Niblung Earl-folk bear fire to the
builded bale:

Then a wind in the west ariseth, and the white flames
leap on high,

And with one voice crieth the people a great and mighty
cry,

And men cast up hands to the heavens, and pray without
a word,

As they that have seen God's visage, and the voice of the
Father have heard.

They are gone — the lovely, the mighty, the hope of the
ancient Earth:

It shall labour and bear the burden as before that day of
their birth :
It shall groan in its blind abiding for the day that Sigurd
hath sped,
And the hour that Brynhild hath hastened, and the dawn
that waketh the dead :
It shall yearn, and be oft-times holpen, and forget their
deeds no more,
Till the new sun beams on Baldur, and the happy sealess
shore.

GUDRUN.

OF THE BATTLE IN ATLI'S HALL.⁵¹

YE shall know that in Atli's feast-hall on the side that
joined the house
Were many carven doorways whose work was glorious
With marble stones and gold-work, and their doors of
beaten brass :
Lo now, in the merry morning how the story cometh to
pass !
— While the echoes of the trumpet yet fill the people's
ears,
And Hogni casts by the war-horn, and his Dwarf-wrought
sword uprears,
All those doors aforesaid open, and in pour the streams
of steel,
The best of the Eastland champions, the bold men of
Atli's weal :
They raise no cry of battle nor cast forth threat of woe,
And their helmed and hidden faces from each other none
may know :
Then a light in the hall ariseth, and the fire of battle
runs
All adown the front of the Niblungs in the face of the
mighty-ones ;
All eyes are set upon them, hard drawn is every breath,
Ere the foremost points be mingled and death be blent
with death.
— All eyes save the eyes of Hogni ; but e'en as the edges
meet,

He turneth about for a moment to the gold of the kingly
seat,
Then aback to the front of battle; there then, as the
lightning-flash
Through the dark night showeth the city when the clouds
of heaven clash,
And the gazer shrinketh backward, yet he seeth from end
to end
The street and the merry market, and the windows of
his friend,
And the pavement where his footsteps yestre'en return-
ing trod,
Now white and changed and dreadful 'neath the threaten-
ing voice of God;
So Hogni seeth Gudrun, and the face he used to
know,
Unspeakable, unchanging, with white unknitted brow
With half-closed lips untrembling, with deedless hands
and cold
Laid still on knees that stir not, and the linen's moveless
fold.

Turned Hogni unto the spear-wall, and smote from
where he stood,
And hewed with his sword two-handed as the axe-man in
a wood:
Before his sword was a champion and the edges clave to
the chin,
And the first man fell in the feast-hall of those that
should fall therein.
Then man with man was dealing, and the Niblung host
of war
Was swept by the leaping iron, as the rock anigh the
shore
By the ice-cold waves of winter: yet a moment Gunnar
stayed,
As high in his hand unbloodied he shook his awful
blade;
And he cried:

“O Eastland champions, do ye behold it
here,
The sword of the ancient Giuki? Fall on and have no
fear,

But slay and be slain and be famous, if your master's will
it be!

Yet are we the blameless Niblungs, and bidden guests
are we:

So forbear, if ye wander hood-winked, nor for nothing
slay and be slain;

For I know not what to tell you of the dead that live
again."

So he saith in the midst of the foemen with his war-flame
reared on high,

But all about and around him goes up a bitter cry
From the iron men of Atli, and the bickering of the steel
Sends a roar up to the roof-ridge, and the Niblung war-
ranks reel

Behind the steadfast Gunnar: but lo, have ye seen the
corn,

While yet men grind the sickle, by the wind-streak over-
borne

When the sudden rain sweeps downward, and summer
groweth black

And the smitten wood-side roareth 'neath the driving
thunder-wrack?

So before the wise-heart Hogni shrank the champions of
the East

As his great voice shook the timbers in the hall of Atli's
feast.

There he smote and beheld not the smitten, and by
nought were his edges stopped;

He smote and the dead were thrust from him; a hand
with its shield he lopped;

There met him Atli's marshal, and his arm at the shoulder
he shred;

Three swords were upreared against him of the best of
the kin of the dead;

And he struck off a head to the rightward, and his sword
through a throat he thrust,

But the third stroke fell on his helm-crest, and he stooped
to the ruddy dust,

And uprose as the ancient Giant, and both his hands
were wet:

Red then was the world to his eyen, as his hand to the
labour he set;

Swords shook and fell in his pathway, huge bodies leapt
and fell,
Harsh grided shield and war-helm like the tempest-
smitten bell,
And the war-cries ran together, and no man his brother
knew,
And the dead men loaded the living, as he went the war-
wood through ;
And man 'gainst man was huddled, till no sword rose to
smite,
And clear stood the glorious Hogni in an island of the
fight,
And there ran a river of death 'twixt the Niblung and
his foes
And therefrom the terror of men and the wrath of the
Gods arose.

Now fell the sword of Gunnar and rose up red in the
air,
And hearkened the song of the Niblung, as his voice
rang glad and clear,
And rejoiced and leapt at the Eastmen, and cried as it
met the rings
Of a giant of King Atli, and a murder-wolf of Kings ;
But it quenched its thirst in his entrails, and knew the
heart in his breast,
And hearkened the praise of Gunnar, and lingered not to
rest,
But fell upon Atli's brother and stayed not in his brain ;
Then he fell and the King leapt over, and clave a neck
atwain,
And leapt o'er the sweep of a pole-axe and thrust a lord
in the throat,
And King Atli's banner-bearer through shield and hauberk
smote ;
Then he laughed on the huddled East-folk, and against
their war-shields drave
While the white swords tossed about him, and that
archer's skull he clave
Whom Atli had bought in the Southlands for many a
pound of gold ;
And the dark-skinned fell upon Gunnar and over his war-
shield rolled

And cumbered his sword for a season, and the many
blades fell on,
And sheared the cloudy helm-crest and rents in his
hauberk won,
And the red blood ran from Gunnar; till that Giuki's
sword outburst,
As the fire-tongue from the smoulder that the leafy heap
hath nursed,
And unshielded smote King Gunnar, and sent the Niblung
song
Through the quaking stems of battle in the hall of Atli's
wrong:
Then he rent the knitted war-hedge till by Hogni's side
he stood,
And kissed him amidst of the spear-hail, and their cheeks
were wet with blood.

Then on came the Niblung bucklers, and they drave the
East-folk home
As the bows of the oar-driven long-ship beat off the waves
in foam:
They leave their dead behind them, and they come to the
doors and the wall,
And a few last spears from the fleeing amidst their shield-
hedge fall:
But the doors clash to in their faces, as the fleeing rout
they drive,
And fain would follow after; and none is left alive
In the feast-hall of King Atli, save those fishes of the net,
And the white and silent woman above the slaughter set.

Then biddeth the heart-wise Hogni, and men to the win-
dows climb,
And uplift the war-grey corpses, dead drift of the stormy
time,
And cast them adown to their people: thence they come
aback and say
That scarce shall ye see the houses, and no whit the
wheel-worn way
For the spears and shields of the Eastlands that the mer-
chant city throng;
And back to the Niblung burg-gate the way seemed weary-
long.

Yet passeth hour on hour, and the doors they watch and
ward
But a long while hear no mail-clash, nor the ringing of
the sword;
Then droop the Niblung children, and their wounds are
waxen chill,
And they think of the Burg by the river, and the builded
holy hill,
And their eyes are set on Gudrun as of men who would
beseech;
But unlearned are they in craving and know not dastard's
speech.
Then doth Giuki's first-begotten a deed most fair to be
told,
For his fair harp Gunnar taketh, and the warp of silver
and gold;
With the hand of a cunning harper he dealeth with the
strings,
And his voice in their midst goeth upward, as of ancient
days he sings,
Of the days before the Niblungs, and the days that shall
be yet;
Till the hour of toil and smiting the warrior hearts
forget,
Nor hear the gathering foemen, nor the sound of swords
aloof:
Then clear the song of Gunnar goes up to the dusky
roof,
And the coming spear-host tarries, and the bearers of the
woe
Through the cloisters of King Atli with lingering foot-
steps go.

But Hogni looketh on Gudrun, and no change in her face
he sees,
And no stir in her folded linen and the deedless hands
on her knees:
Then from Gunnar's side he hasteneth; and lo, the open
door,
And a foeman treadeth the pavement, and his lips are on
Atli's floor,
For Hogni is death in the doorway: then the Niblungs
turn on the foe,

And the hosts are mingled together, and blow cries out on
blow.

Still the song goeth up from Gunnar, though his harp to
earth be laid ;
But he fighteth exceeding wisely, and is many a warrior's
aid,
And he shieldeth and delivereth, and his eyes search
through the hall,
And woe is he for his fellows, as his battle-brethren fall ;
For the turmoil hideth little from that glorious folk-
king's eyes,
And o'er all he beholdeth Gudrun, and his soul is waxen
wise,
And he saith : We shall look on Sigurd, and Sigmund of
old days,
And see the boughs of the Branstock o'er the ancient
Volsung's praise.

Woe's me for the wrath of Hogni ! From the door he
giveth aback
That the Eastland slayers may enter to the murder and
the wrack :
Then he rageth and driveth the battle to the golden
kingly seat,
And the last of the foes he slayeth by Gudrun's very feet,
That the red blood splasheth her raiment ; and his own
blood therewithal
He casteth aloft before her, and the drops on her white
hands fall :
But nought she seeth or heedeth, and again he turns to
the fight,

Nor heedeth stroke nor wounding so he a foe may
smite :
Then the battle opens before him, and the Niblungs draw
to his side ;
As Death in the world first fashioned, through the feast-
hall doth he stride.
And so once more do the Niblungs sweep that murder-
flood of men
From the hall of toils and treason, and the doors swing
to again.

Then again is there peace for a little within the fateful
fold ;
But the Niblungs look about them, and but few folk they
behold
Upright on their feet for the battle : now they climb aloft
no more,
Nor cast the dead from the windows ; but they raise a
rampart of war,
And its stones are the fallen East-folk, and no lowly wall
is that.

Therein was Gunnar the mighty : on the shields of men
he sat,
And the sons of his people hearkened, for his hand
through the harp-strings ran,
And he sang in the hall of his foeman of the Gods and
the making of man,
And how season was sundered from season in the days
of the fashioning,
And became the Summer and Autumn, and became the
Winter and Spring ;
He sang of men's hunger and labour, and their love and
their breeding of broil,
And their hope that is fostered of famine, and their rest
that is fashioned of toil :
Fame then and the sword he sang of, and the hour of the
hardy and wise,
When the last of the living shall perish, and the first of
the dead shall arise,
And the torch shall be lit in the daylight, and God unto
man shall pray,
And the heart shall cry out for the hand in the fight of
the uttermost day.

So he sang, and beheld not Gudrun, save as long ago he
saw
His sister, the little maiden of the face without a flaw :
But wearily Hogni beheld her, and no change in her face
there was,
And long thereon gazed Hogni, and set his brows as the
brass,
Though the hands of the King were weary, and weak his
knees were grown,

And he felt as a man unholpen in a waste land wending alone.

Now the noon was long passed over when again the rumour arose,
And through the doors cast open flowed in the river of foes :

They flooded the hall of the murder, and surged round that rampart of dead ;

No war-duke ran before them, no lord to the onset led,
Till the misty hall was blinded with the bitter drift of war:
But the thralls shot spears at adventure, and shot out shafts from afar,

Few and faint were the Niblung children, and their wounds were waxen acold,

And they saw the Hell-gates open as they stood in their grimly hold :

Yet thrice stormed out King Hogni, thrice stormed out Gunnar the King,

Thrice fell they aback yet living to the heart of the fated ring ;

And they looked and their band was little, and no man but was wounded sore,

And the hall seemed growing greater, such hosts of foes it bore,

So tossed the iron harvest from wall to gilded wall ;

And they looked and the white-clad Gudrun sat silent over all.

Then the churls and thralls of the Eastland howled out as wolves accurst,

But oft gaped the Niblungs voiceless, for they choked with anger and thirst ;

And the hall grew hot as a furnace, and men drank their flowing blood,

Men laughed and gnawed on their shield-rims, men knew not where they stood,

And saw not what was before them ; as in the dark men smote,

Men died heart-broken, unsmitten ; men wept with the cry in the throat,

Men lived on full of war-shafts, men cast their shields aside

And caught the spears to their bosoms; men rushed with
none beside,
And fell unarmed on the foemen, and tore and slew in
death:
And still down rained the arrows as the rain across the
heath;
Still proud o'er all the turmoil stood the Kings of Giuki
born,
Nor knit were the brows of Gunnar, nor his song-speech
overworn;
But Hogni's mouth kept silence, and oft his heart went
forth
To the long, long day of the darkness, and the end of
worldly worth.

Loud rose the roar of the East-folk, and the end was com-
ing at last;
Now the foremost locked their shield-rims and the hind-
most over them cast,
And nigher they drew and nigher, and their fear was
fading away,
For every man of the Niblungs on the shaft-strewn pave-
ment lay,
Save Gunnar the King and Hogni: still the glorious
King up-bore
The cloudy shield of the Niblungs set full of shafts of
war;
But Hogni's hands had fainted, and his shield had sunk
adown,
So thick with the Eastland spearwood was that rampart
of renown;
And hacked and dull were the edges that had rent the
wall of foes:
Yet he stood upright by Gunnar before that shielded
close,
Nor looked on the foemen's faces as their wild eyes drew
anear,
And their faltering shield-rims clattered with the remnant
of their fear;
But he gazed on the Niblung woman, and the daughter
of his folk,
Who sat o'er all unchanging ere the war-cloud over them
broke.

Now nothing might men hearken in the house of Atli's
weal,
Save the feet slow tramping onward, and the rattling of
the steel,
And the song of the glorious Gunnar, that rang as clearly
now
As the speckled storm-cock singeth from the scant-leaved
hawthorn-bough,
When the sun is dusking over and the March snow pelts
the land.
There stood the mighty Gunnar with sword and shield in
hand,
There stood the shieldless Hogni with set unangry eyes,
And watched the wall of war-shields o'er the dead men's
rampart rise,
And the white blades flickering nigher, and the quavering
points of war.
Then the heavy air of the feast-hall was rent with a fear-
ful roar,
And the turmoil came and the tangle, as the wall to-
gether ran:

But aloft yet towered the Niblungs, and man toppled
over man,
And leapt and struggled to tear them; as whiles amidst
the sea
The doomed ship strives its utmost with mid-ocean's
mastery,
And the tall masts whip the cordage, while the welter
whirls and leaps,
And they rise and reel and waver, and sink amid the
deeps:
So before the little-hearted in King Atli's murder-hall
Did the glorious sons of Giuki 'neath the shielded onrush
fall:
Sore wounded, bound and helpless, but living yet, they
lie
Till the afternoon and the even in the first of night shall
die.

POEMS BY THE WAY.

SOCIALISTIC, ROMANTIC, AND ICELANDIC.

POEMS BY THE WAY.

FROM THE UPLAND TO THE SEA.³⁸

SHALL we wake one morn of spring,
Glad at heart of everything,
Yet pensive with the thought of eve ?
Then the white house shall we leave,
Pass the wind-flowers and the bays,
Through the garth, and go our ways,
Wandering down among the meads
Till our very joyance needs
Rest at last ; till we shall come
To that Sun-god's lonely home,
Lonely on the hillside grey,
Whence the sheep have gone away ;
Lonely till the feast-time is,
When with prayer and praise of bliss,
Thither comes the country-side.
There awhile shall we abide,
Sitting low down in the porch
By that image with the torch :
Thy one white hand laid upon
The black pillar that was won
From the far-off Indian mine ;
And my hand nigh touching thine,
But not touching ; and thy gown
Fair with spring-flowers cast adown
From thy bosom and thy brow.
There the south-west wind shall blow
Through thine hair to reach my cheek,
As thou sittest, nor mayst speak,
Nor mayst move the hand I kiss
For the very depth of bliss ;
Nay, nor turn thine eyes to me.
Then desire of the great sea
Nigh enow, but all unheard,
In the hearts of us is stirred,

And we rise, we twain at last,
And the daffodils downcast,
Feel thy feet and we are gone
From the lonely Sun-Crowned one.
Then the meads fade at our back,
And the spring day 'gins to lack
That fresh hope that once it had ;
But we twain grow yet more glad,
And apart no more may go
When the grassy slope and low
Dieth in the shingly sand :
Then we wander hand in hand
By the edges of the sea,
And I weary more for thee
Than if far apart we were,
With a space of desert drear
'Twixt thy lips and mine, O love !
Ah, my joy, my joy thereof !

HOPE DIETH: LOVE LIVETH.

STRONG are thine arms, O love, and strong
Thine heart to live, and love, and long ;
But thou art wed to grief and wrong :
Live, then, and long, though hope be dead !
Live on, and labour through the years !
Make pictures through the mist of tears,
Of unforgotten happy fears,
That crossed the time ere hope was dead.
Draw near the place where once we stood
Amid delight's swift-rushing flood,
And we and all the world seemed good
Nor needed hope now cold and dead.
Dream in the dawn I come to thee
Weeping for things that may not be !
Dream that thou layest lips on me !
Wake, wake to clasp hope's body dead !
Count o'er and o'er, and one by one,
The minutes of the happy sun
That while agone on kissed lips shone,

Count on, rest not, for hope is dead.
Weep, though no hair's breadth thou shalt move
The living Earth, the heaven above,
By all the bitterness of love!
Weep and cease not, now hope is dead!
Sighs rest thee not, tears bring no ease,
Life hath no joy, and Death no peace:
The years change not, though they decrease,
For hope is dead, for hope is dead.
Speak, love, I listen: far away
I bless the tremulous lips, that say,
"Mock not the afternoon of day,
Mock not the tide when hope is dead!"
I bless thee, O my love, who say'st:
"Mock not the thistle-cumbered waste;
I hold Love's hand, and make no haste
Down the long way, now hope is dead.
With other names do we name pain,
The long years wear our hearts in vain.
Mock not our loss grown into gain,
Mock not our lost hope lying dead.
Our eyes gaze for no morning-star,
No glimmer of the dawn afar;
Full silent wayfarers we are
Since ere the noon-tide hope lay dead.
Behold with lack of happiness
The master, Love, our hearts did bless
Lest we should think of him the less:
Love dieth not, though hope is dead!"

THE HALL AND THE WOOD.³³

'T was in the water-dwindling tide
When July days were done,
Sir Rafe of Greenhowes 'gan to ride
In the earliest of the sun.

He left the white-walled burg behind,
He rode amidst the wheat.
The westland-gotten wind blew kind
Across the acres sweet.

Then rose his heart and cleared his brow,
And slow he rode the way :
" As then it was, so is it now,
Not all hath worn away."

So came he to the long green lane
That leadeth to the ford,
And saw the sickle by the wain
Shine bright as any sword.

The brown carles stayed 'twixt draught and draught,
And murmuring, stood aloof,
But one spake out when he had laughed :
" God bless the Green-wood Roof ! "

Then o'er the ford and up he fared :
And lo the happy hills !
And the mountain-dale by summer cleared,
That oft the winter fills.

Then forth he rode by Peter's gate,
And smiled and said aloud :
" No more a day doth the Prior wait ;
White stands the tower and proud."

There leaned a knight on the gateway side
In armour white and wan,
And after the heels of the horse he cried,
" God keep the hunted man ! "

Then quoth Sir Rafe, " Amen, amen ! "
For he deemed the word was good ;
But never awhile he lingered then
Till he reached the Nether Wood.

He rode by ash, he rode by oak,
He rode the thicket round,
And heard no woodman strike a stroke,
No wandering wife he found.

He rode the wet, he rode the dry,
He rode the grassy glade :
At Wood-end yet the sun was high,
And his heart was unafraid.

There on the bent his rein he drew,
And looked o'er field and fold,
O'er all the merry meads he knew
Beneath the mountains old.

He gazed across to the good Green Howe
As he smelt the sun-warmed sward;
Then his face grew pale from chin to brow,
And he cried, "God save the sword!"

For there beyond the winding way,
Above the orchards green,
Stood up the ancient gables grey
With ne'er a roof between.

His naked blade in hand he had,
O'er rough and smooth he rode,
Till he stood where once his heart was glad
Amidst his old abode.

Across the hearth a tie-beam lay
Unmoved a weary while.
The flame that clomb the ashlar grey
Had burned it red as tile.

The sparrows bickering on the floor
Fled at his entering in;
The swift flew past the empty door
His winged meat to win.

Red apples from the tall old tree
O'er the wall's rent were shed.
Thence oft, a little lad, would he
Look down upon the lead.

There turned the cheeping chaffinch now
And feared no birding child;
Through the shot-window thrust a bough
Of garden-rose run wild.

He looked to right, he looked to left,
And down to the cold grey hearth,
Where lay an axe with half burned heft
Amidst the ashen dearth.

He caught it up and cast it wide
Against the gable wall;
Then to the dais did he stride,
O'er beam and bench and all.

Amidst there yet the high-seat stood,
Where erst his sires had sat;
And the mighty board of oaken wood,
The fire had stayed thereat.

Then through the red wrath of his eyne
He saw a sheathed sword,
Laid thwart that wasted field of wine,
Amidmost of the board.

And by the hilts a slug-horn lay,
And therebeside a scroll,
He caught it up and turned away
From the lea-land of the bowl.

Then with the sobbing grief he strove,
For he saw his name thereon;
And the heart within his breast uphove
As the pen's tale now he won.

"O Rafe, my love of long ago!
Draw forth thy father's blade,
And blow the horn for friend and foe,
And the good green-wood to aid!"

He turned and took the slug-horn up,
And set it to his mouth,
And o'er that meadow of the cup
Blew east and west and south.

He drew the sword from out the sheath
And shook the fallow brand;
And there a while with bated breath,
And hearkening ear did stand.

Him-seemed the horn's voice he might hear —
Or the wind that blew o'er all.
Him-seemed that footsteps drew anear —
Or the boughs shook round the hall.

Him-seemed he heard a voice he knew —
Or a dream of while ago.
Him-seemed bright raiment towards him drew —
Or bright the sun-set shone.

She stood before him face to face,
With the sun-beam thwart her hand,
As on the gold of the Holy Place
The painted angels stand.

With many a kiss she closed his eyes ;
She kissed him cheek and chin :
E'en so in the painted Paradise
Are Earth's folk welcomed in.

There in the door the green-coats stood,
O'er the bows went up the cry,
"O welcome, Rafe, to the free green-wood,
With us to live and die."

It was bill and bow by the high-seat stood,
And they cried above the bows,
"Now welcome, Rafe, to the good green-wood,
And welcome Kate the Rose !"

White, white in the moon is the woodland plash,
White is the woodland glade,
Forth wend those twain, from oak to ash,
With light hearts unafraid.

The summer moon high o'er the hill,
All silver-white is she,
And Sir Rafe's good men with bow and bill,
They go by two and three.

In the fair green-wood where lurks no fear,
Where the King's writ runneth not,
There dwell they, friends and fellows dear,
While summer days are hot.

And when the leaf from the oak-tree falls,
And winds blow rough and strong,
With the carles of the woodland thorps and halls
They dwell, and fear no wrong.

And there the merry yule they make,
And see the winter wane,
And fain are they for true-love's sake,
And the folk thereby are fain.

For the ploughing carle and the straying herd
Flee never for Sir Rafe:
No barefoot maiden wends afeard,
And she deems the thicket safe.

But sore adread do the chapmen ride;
Wide round the wood they go;
And the judge and the sergeants wander wide,
Lest they plead before the bow.

Well learned and wise is Sir Rafe's good sword,
And straight the arrows fly,
And they find the coat of many a lord,
And the crest that rideth high.

GOLDILOCKS AND GOLDILOCKS.

It was Goldilocks woke up in the morn
At the first of the shearing of the corn.

There stood his mother on the hearth
And of new-leased wheat was little dearth.

There stood his sisters by the quern,
For the high-noon cakes they needs must earn.

"O tell me Goldilocks my son,
Why hast thou coloured raiment on?"

"Why should I wear the hodden grey
When I am light of heart to-day?"

"O tell us, brother, why ye wear
In reaping-tide the scarlet gear?"

"Why hangeth the sharp sword at thy side
When through the land 't is the hook goes wide?"

"Gay-clad am I that men may know
The freeman's son where'er I go.

"The grinded sword at side I bear
Lest I the dastard's word should hear."

"O tell me Goldilocks my son,
Of whither away thou wilt be gone?"

"The morn is fair and the world is wide,
And here no more will I abide."

"O Brother, when wilt thou come again?"
"The autumn drought, and the winter rain,

"The frost and the snow, and St. David's wind,
All these that were time out of mind,

"All these a many times shall be
Ere the Upland Town again I see."

"O Goldilocks my son, farewell,
As thou wendest the world 'twixt home and hell!"

"O brother Goldilocks, farewell,
Come back with a tale for men to tell!"

So 't is wellaway for Goldilocks,
As he left the land of the wheaten shocks.

He's gotten him far from the Upland Town,
And he's gone by Dale and he's gone by Down.

He's come to the wild-wood dark and drear,
Where never the bird's song doth he hear.

He has slept in the moonless wood and dim
With never a voice to comfort him.

He has risen up under the little light
Where the noon is as dark as the summer night.

Six days therein has he walked alone
Till his scrip was bare and his meat was done.

On the seventh morn in the mirk, mirk wood,
He saw sight that he deemed was good.

It was as one sees a flower a-bloom
In the dusky heat of a shuttered room.

He deemed the fair thing far aloof,
And would go and put it to the proof.

But the very first step he made from the place
He met a maiden face to face.

Face to face, and so close was she
That their lips met soft and lovingly.

Sweet-mouthed she was, and fair he wist;
And again in the darksome wood they kissed.

Then first in the wood her voice he heard,
As sweet as the song of the summer bird.

"O thou fair man with the golden head,
What is the name of thee?" she said.

"My name is Goldilocks," said he;
"O sweet-breathed, what is the name of thee?"

"O Goldilocks the Swain," she said,
"My name is Goldilocks the Maid."

He spake, "Love me as I love thee,
And Goldilocks one flesh shall be."

She said, "Fair man, I wot not how
Thou lovest, but I love thee now.

"But come a little hence away,
That I may see thee in the day.

"For hereby is a wood-lawn clear
And good for awhile for us it were."

Therewith she took him by the hand
And led him into the lighter land.

There on the grass they sat adown.
Clad she was in a kirtle brown.

In all the world was never maid
So fair, so evilly arrayed.

No shoes upon her feet she had,
And scanty were her shoulders clad;

Through her brown kirtle's rents full wide
Shown out the sleekness of her side.

An old scrip hung about her neck,
Nought of her raiment did she reck.

No shame of all her rents had she;
She gazed upon him eagerly.

She leaned across the grassy space
And put her hands about his face.

She said: "O hunger-pale art thou,
Yet shalt thou eat though I hunger now."

She took him apples from her scrip,
She kissed him, cheek and chin and lip.

She took him cakes of woodland bread:
"Whiles am I hunger-pinched," she said.

She had a gourd and a pilgrim shell;
She took him water from the well.

She stroked his breast and his scarlet gear;
She spake, "How brave thou art and dear!"

Her arms about him did she wind;
He felt her body dear and kind.

"O love," she said, "now two are one,
And whither hence shall we be gone?"

"Shall we fare further than this wood,"
Quoth he, "I deem it dear and good?"

She shook her head, and laughed, and spake;
 "Rise up! For thee, not me, I quake.

"Had she been minded me to slay
 Sure she had done it ere to-day.

"But thou: this hour the crone shall know
 That thou art come, her very foe.

"No minute more on tidings wait,
 Lest e'en this minute be too late."

She led him from the sunlit green,
 Going sweet-stately as a queen.

There in the dusky wood, and dim,
 As forth they went, she spake to him:

"Fair man, few people have I seen
 Amidst this world of woodland green:

"But I would have thee tell me now
 If there be many such as thou."

"Betwixt the mountains and the sea,
 O Sweet, be many such," said he.

Athwart the glimmering air and dim
 With wistful eyes she looked on him.

"But ne'er an one so shapely made
 Mine eyes have looked upon," she said.

He kissed her face, and cried in mirth:
 "Where hast thou dwelt then on the earth?"

"Ever," she said, "I dwell alone
 With a hard-handed cruel crone.

"And of this crone am I the thrall
 To serve her still in bower and hall;

"And fetch and carry in the wood,
 And do whate'er she deemeth good.

"But whiles a sort of folk there come
And seek my mistress at her home;

"But such-like are they to behold
As make my very blood run cold.

"Oft have I thought, if there be none
On earth save these, would all were done!

"Forsooth, I knew it was not so,
But that fairer folk on earth did grow.

"But fain and full is the heart in me
To know that folk are like to thee."

Then hand in hand they stood awhile
Till her tears rose up beneath his smile.

And he must fold her to his breast
To give her heart awhile of rest.

Till sundered she and gazed about,
And bent her brows as one in doubt.

She spake: "The wood is growing thin,
Into the full light soon shall we win.

"Now crouch we that we be not seen,
Under yon bramble-bushes green."

Under the bramble-bush they lay
Betwixt the dusk and the open day.

"O Goldilocks my love, look forth
And let me know what thou seest of worth."

He said: "I see a house of stone,
A castle excellently done."

"Yea," quoth she, "there doth the mistress dwell.
What next thou seest shalt thou tell."

"What lookest thou to see come forth?"
"Maybe a white bear of the North."

"Then shall my sharp sword lock his mouth."
"Nay," she said, "or a worm of the South."

"Then shall my sword his hot blood cool."
"Nay, or a whelming poison-pool."

"The trees its swelling flood shall stay,
And thrust its venom'd lip away."

"Nay, it may be a wild-fire flash
To burn thy lovely limbs to ash."

"On mine own hallows shall I call,
And dead its flickering flame shall fall."

"O Goldilocks my love, I fear
That ugly death shall seek us here."

"Look forth, O Goldilocks my love,
That I thine hardy heart may prove."

"What cometh down the stone-wrought stair
That leadeth up to the castle fair?"

"Adown the doorward stair of stone
There cometh a woman all alone."

"Yea, that forsooth shall my mistress be:
O Goldilocks, what like is she?"

"O fair she is of her array,
As hitherward she wends her way."

"Unlike her wont is that indeed:
Is she not foul beneath her weed?"

"O nay, nay! But most wondrous fair
Of all the women earth doth bear."

"O Goldilocks, my heart, my heart!
Woe, woe! for now we drift apart."

But up he sprang from the bramble-side,
And "O thou fairest one!" he cried:

And forth he ran that Queen to meet,
And fell before her gold-clad feet.

About his neck her arms she cast,
And into the fair-built house they passed.

And under the bramble-bushes lay
Unholpen, Goldilocks the may.

Thenceforth awhile of time there wore,
And Goldilocks came forth no more.

Throughout that house he wandered wide,
Both up and down, from side to side.

But never he saw an evil crone,
But a full fair Queen on a golden throne.

Never a barefoot maid did he see,
But a gay and gallant company.

He sat upon the golden throne,
And beside him sat the Queen alone.

Kind she was, as she loved him well,
And many a merry tale did tell.

But nought he laughed, nor spake again,
For all his life was waste and vain.

Cold was his heart, and all afraid
To think on Goldilocks the Maid.

Withal now was the wedding dight
When he should wed that lady bright.

The night was gone, and the day was up
When they should drink the bridal cup.

And he sat at the board beside the Queen,
Amidst of a guest-folk well beseen.

But scarce was midmorn on the hall,
When down did the mirk of midnight fall.

Then up and down from the board they ran,
And man laid angry hand on man.

There was the cry, and the laughter shrill,
And every manner word of ill.

Whoso of men had hearkened it,
Had deemed he had woke up over the Pit.

Then spake the Queen o'er all the crowd,
And grim was her speech, and harsh, and loud :

"Hold now your peace, ye routing swine,
While I sit with mine own love over the wine !

"For this dusk is the very deed of a foe,
Or under the sun no man I know."

And hard she spake, and loud she cried
Till the noise of the bickering guests had died.

Then again she spake amidst of the mirk,
In a voice like an uncoiled wheel at work :

"Whoso would have a goodly gift,
Let him bring aback the sun to the lift.

"Let him bring aback the light and the day,
And rich and in peace he shall go his way."

Out spake a voice was clean and clear :
"Lo, I am she to dight your gear ;

"But I for the deed a gift shall gain,
To sit by Goldilocks the Swain.

"I shall sit at the board by the bridegroom's side,
And be betwixt him and the bride.

"I shall eat of his dish, and drink of his cup,
Until for the bride-bed ye rise up."

Then was the Queen's word wailing-wild :
"E'en so must it be, thou Angel's child.

"Thou shalt sit by my groom till the dawn of night,
And then shalt thou wend thy ways aright."

Said the voice, "Yet shalt thou swear an oath
That free I shall go though ye be loth."

"How shall I swear?" the false Queen spake:
"Wherewith the sure oath shall I make?"

"Thou shalt swear by the one eye left in thine head,
And the throng of the ghosts of the evil dead."

She swore the oath, and then she spake:
"Now let the second dawn awake."

And e'en therewith the thing was done;
There was peace in the hall, and the light of the sun.

And again the Queen was calm and fair,
And courteous sat the guest-folk there.

Yet unto Goldilocks it seemed
As if amidst the night he dreamed;

As if he sat in a grassy place,
While slim hands framed his hungry face;

As if in the clearing of the wood
One gave him bread and apples good;

And nought he saw of the guest-folk gay,
And nought of all the Queen's array.

Yet saw he betwixt board and door,
A slim maid tread the chequered floor.

Her gown of green so fair was wrought,
That clad her body seemed with nought

But blossoms of the summer-tide,
That wreathed her, limbs and breast and side.

And, stepping towards him daintily,
A basket in her hand had she.

And as she went, from head to feet,
Surely was she most dainty-sweet.

Love floated round her, and her eyes
Gazed from her fairness glad and wise;

But babbling-loud the guests were grown;
Unnoted was she and unknown.

Now Goldilocks she sat beside,
But nothing changed was the Queenly bride;

Yea too, and Goldilocks the Swain
Was grown but dull and dazed again.

The Queen smiled o'er the guest-rich board,
Although his wine the Maiden poured;

Though from his dish the Maiden ate,
The Queen sat happy and sedate.

But now the Maiden fell to speak
From lips that well-nigh touched his cheek:

"O Goldilocks, dost thou forget?
Or mindest thou the mirk-wood yet?"

"Forgettest thou the hunger-pain
And all thy young life made but vain?"

"How there was nought to help or aid,
But for poor Goldilocks the Maid?"

She murmured, "Each to each we two,
Our faces from the wood-mirk grew.

"Hast thou forgot the grassy place,
And love betwixt us face to face?"

"Hast thou forgot how fair I deemed
Thy face? How fair thy garment seemed?"

"Thy kisses on my shoulders bare,
Through rents of the poor raiment there?"

"My arms that loved thee nought unknissed
All o'er from shoulder unto wrist ?

"Hast thou forgot how brave thou wert,
Thou with thy fathers' weapon girt ;

"When underneath the bramble-bush
I quaked like river-shaken rush,

"Wondering what new-wrought shape of death
Should quench my new love-quicken'd breath ?

"Or else : forget'st thou, Goldilocks,
Thine own land of the wheaten shocks ?

"Thy mother and thy sisters dear,
Thou said'st would bide thy true-love there ?

"Hast thou forgot ? Hast thou forgot ?
O love, my love, I move thee not."

Silent the fair Queen sat and smiled,
And heeded nought the Angel's child,

For like an image fashioned fair
Still sat the Swain with empty stare.

These words seemed spoken not, but writ
As foolish tales through night-dreams flit.

Vague pictures passed before his sight,
As in the first dream of the night.

But the Maiden opened her basket fair,
And set two doves on the table there.

And soft they cooed, and sweet they billed
Like man and maid with love fulfilled.

Therewith the Maiden reached a hand
To a dish that on the board did stand ;

And she crumbled a share of the spice-loaf brown,
And the Swain upon her hand looked down;

Then unto the fowl his eyes he turned;
And as in a dream his bowels yearned

For somewhat that he could not name
And into his heart a hope there came.

And still he looked on the hands of the Maid,
As before the fowl the crumbs she laid.

And he murmured low, "O Goldilocks!
Were we but amid the wheaten shocks!"

Then the false Queen knit her brows and laid
A fair white hand by the hand of the Maid.

He turned his eyes away thereat,
And closer to the Maiden sat.

But the queen-bird now the carle-bird fed
Till all was gone of the sugared bread.

Then with wheedling voice for more he craved,
And the maid a share from the spice-loaf shaved;

And the crumbs within her hollow hand
She held where the creeping doves did stand.

But Goldilocks, he looked and longed,
And saw how the carle the queen-bird wronged.

For when she came to the hand to eat
The hungry queen-bird thence he beat.

Then Goldilocks the Swain spake low:
"Foul fall thee, bird, thou doest now

"As I to Goldilocks, my sweet,
Who gave my hungry mouth to eat."

He felt her hand as he did speak,
He felt her face against his cheek.

He turned and stood in the evil hall,
And swept her up in arms withal.

Then was there hubbub wild and strange,
And swiftly all things there 'gan change.

The fair Queen into a troll was grown,
A one-eyed, bow-backed, haggard crone.

And though the hall was yet full fair,
And bright the sunshine streamed in there,

On evil shapes it fell forsooth:
Swine-heads; small red eyes void of ruth;

And bare-boned bodies of vile things,
And evil-feathered bat-felled wings.

And all these mopped and mowed and grinned,
And sent strange noises down the wind.

There stood those twain unchanged alone
To face the horror of the crone;

She crouched against them by the board;
And cried the Maid: "Thy sword, thy sword!

"Thy sword, O Goldilocks! For see
She will not keep her oath to me."

Out flashed the blade therewith. He saw
The foul thing sidelong toward them draw,

Holding within her hand a cup
Wherein some dreadful drink seethed up.

Then Goldilocks cried out and smote,
And the sharp blade sheared the evil throat.

The head fell noseling to the floor;
The liquor from the cup did pour,

And ran along a sparkling flame
That nigh unto their footsoles came.

Then empty straightway was the hall,
Save for those twain, and she withal.

So fled away the Maid and Man,
And down the stony stairway ran.

Fast fled they o'er the sunny grass,
Yet but a little way did pass

Ere cried the Maid : " Now cometh forth
The snow-white ice-bear of the North ;

" Turn, Goldilocks, and heave up sword ! "
Then fast he stood upon the sward,

And faced the beast, that whined and cried,
And shook his head from side to side.

But round him the Swain danced and leaped,
And soon the grisly head he reaped.

And then the ancient blade he sheathed,
And ran unto his love sweet-breathed ;

And caught her in his arms and ran
Fast from that house, the bane of man.

Yet therewithal he spake her soft
And kissed her over oft and oft,

Until from kissed and trembling mouth
She cried : " The Dragon of the South ! "

He set her down and turned about,
And drew the eager edges out.

And therewith scaly coil on coil
Reared 'gainst his face the mouth aboil :

The gaping jaw and teeth of dread
Was dark 'twixt heaven and his head.

But with no fear, no thought, no word,
He thrust the thin-edged ancient sword.

And the hot blood ran from the hairy throat,
And set the summer grass afloat.

Then back he turned and caught her hand,
And never a minute did they stand.

But as they ran on toward the wood,
He deemed her swift feet fair and good.

She looked back o'er her shoulder fair :
"The whelming poison-pool is here ;

"And now availeth nought the blade :
O if my cherished trees might aid !

"But now my feet fail. Leave me then !
And hold my memory dear of men."

He caught her in his arms again ;
Of her dear side was he full fain.

Her body in his arms was dear :
"Sweet art thou, though we perish here !"

Like quicksilver came on the flood :
But lo, the borders of the wood !

She slid from out his arms and stayed ;
Round a great oak her arms she laid.

"If e'er I saved thee, lovely tree,
From axe and saw, now succour me :

"Look how the venom creeps anigh,
Help ! lest thou see me writhe and die."

She crouched beside the upheaved root,
The bubbling venom touched her foot ;

Then with a sucking gasping sound
It ebbed back o'er the blighted ground.

Up then she rose and took his hand
And never a moment did they stand.

"Come, love," she cried, "the ways I know,
How thick soe'er the thickets grow.

"O love, I love thee! O thine heart!
How mighty and how kind thou art!"

Therewith they saw the tree-dusk lit,
Bright grey the great boles gleamed on it.

"O flee," she said, "the sword is nought
Against the flickering fire-flaught."

"But this availeth yet," said he,
"That Hallows All our love may see."

He turned about and faced the glare:
"O Mother, help us, kind and fair!"

"Now help me, true St. Nicholas,
If ever truly thine I was!"

Therewith the wild-fire waned and paled,
And in the wood the light nigh failed;

And all about 't was as the night.
He said: "Now won is all our fight,

"And now meseems all were but good
If thou mightst bring us from the wood."

She fawned upon him, face and breast;
She said: "It hangs 'twixt worst and best.

"And yet, O love, if thou be true,
One thing alone thou hast to do."

Sweetly he kissed her, cheek and chin:
"What work thou biddest will I win."

"O love, my love, I needs must sleep;
Wilt thou my slumbering body keep,

"And, toiling sorely, still bear on
The love thou seemest to have won?"

"O easy toil," he said, "to bless
Mine arms with all thy loveliness."

She smiled; "Yea, easy it may seem,
But harder is it than ye deem.

"For hearken! Whatso thou mayst see,
Piteous as it may seem to thee,

"Heed not nor hearken! bear me forth,
As though nought else were aught of worth.

"For all earth's wealth that may be found
Lay me not sleeping on the ground,

"To help, to hinder, or to save!
Or there for me thou diggest a grave."

He took her body on his arm,
Her slumbering head lay on his barm.

Then glad he bore her on the way,
And the wood grew lighter with the day.

All still it was, till suddenly
He heard a bitter wail near by.

Yet on he went until he heard
The cry become a shapen word:

"Help me, O help, thou passer by!
Turn from the path, let me not die!

"I am a woman; bound and left
To perish; of all help bereft."

Then died the voice out in a moan;
He looked upon his love, his own,

And minding all she spake to him
Strode onward through the wild-wood dim.

But lighter grew the woodland green
Till clear the shapes of things were seen.

And therewith wild halloos he heard,
And shrieks, and cries of one afeard.

Nigher it grew and yet more nigh,
Till burst from out a brake near by

A woman bare of breast and limb,
Who turned a piteous face to him

E'en as she ran : for hard at heel
Followed a man with brandished steel,

And yelling mouth. Then the Swain stood
One moment in the glimmering wood

Trembling, ashamed : Yet now grown wise
Deemed all a snare for ears and eyes.

So onward swiftlier still he strode
And cast all thought on his fair load.

And yet in but a little space
Back came the yelling shrieking chase,

And well-nigh gripped now by the man,
Straight unto him the woman ran ;

And underneath the gleaming steel
E'en at his very feet did kneel.

She looked up ; sobs were all her speech,
Yet sorely did her face beseech.

While o'er her head the chaser stared,
Shaking aloft the edges bared.

Doubted the Swain, and a while did stand
As she took his coat-lap in her hand.

Upon his hand he felt her breath
Hot with the dread of present death.

Sleek was her arm on his scarlet coat,
The sobbing passion rose in his throat.

But e'en therewith he looked aside
And saw the face of the sleeping bride.

Then he tore his coat from the woman's hand,
And never a moment there did stand.

But swiftly thence away he strode
Along the dusky forest road.

And there rose behind him laughter shrill,
And then was the windless wood all still.

He looked around o'er all the place,
But saw no image of the chase.

And as he looked the night-mirk now
O'er all the tangled wood 'gan flow.

Then stirred the sweetling that he bore,
And she slid adown from his arms once more.

Nought might he see her well-loved face;
But he felt her lips in the mirky place.

"'T is night," she said, "and the false day's gone,
And we twain in the wild-wood all alone.

"Night o'er the earth; so rest we here
Until to-morrow's sun is clear.

"For overcome is every foe
And home to-morrow shall we go."

So 'neath the trees they lay, those twain,
And to them the darksome night was gain.

But when the morrow's dawn was grey
They woke and kissed whereas they lay.

And when on their feet they came to stand
Swain Goldilocks stretched out his hand.

And he spake: "O love, my love indeed,
Where now is gone thy goodly weed?"

"For again thy naked feet I see,
And thy sweet sleek arms so kind to me.

"Through thy rent kirtle once again
Thy shining shoulder showeth plain."

She blushed as red as the sun-sweet rose:
"My garments gay were e'en of those

"That the false Queen dight to slay my heart;
And sore indeed was their fleshly smart.

"Yet must I bear them, well-beloved,
Until thy truth and troth was proved.

"And this tattered coat is now for a sign
That thou hast won me to be thine.

"Now wilt thou lead along thy maid
To meet thy kindred unafraid."

As stoops the falcon on the dove
He cast himself about her love.

He kissed her over, cheek and chin,
He kissed the sweetness of her skin.

Then hand in hand they went their way
Till the wood grew light with the outer day.

At last behind them lies the wood,
And before are the Upland Acres good.

On the hill's brow awhile they stay
At midmorn of the merry day.

He sheareth a deal from his kirtle meet,
To make her sandals for her feet.

He windeth a wreath of the beechen tree,
Lest men her shining shoulders see.

And a wreath of woodbine sweet, to hide
The rended raiment of her side;

And a crown of poppies red as wine,
Lest on her head the hot sun shine.

She kissed her love withal and smiled:
"Lead forth, O love, the Woodland Child!

"Most meet and right meseems it now
That I am clad with the woodland bough.

"For betwixt the oak-tree and the thorn
Meseemeth erewhile was I born.

"And if my mother aught I knew,
It was of the woodland folk she grew.

"And O that thou art well at ease
To wed the daughter of the trees!"

Now Goldilocks and Goldilocks
Go down amidst the wheaten shocks,

But when anigh to the town they come,
Lo there is the wain a-wending home,

And many a man and maid beside,
Who tossed the sickles up, and cried:

"O Goldilocks, now whither away?
And what wilt thou with the woodland may?"

"O this is Goldilocks my bride,
And we come adown from the wild-wood side,

"And unto the Fathers' House we wend
To dwell therein till life shall end."

"Up then on the wain, that ye may see
From afar how thy mother bideth thee.

"That ye may see how kith and kin
Abide thee, bridal brave to win."

So Goldilocks and Goldilocks
Sit high aloft on the wheaten shocks,

And fair maids sing before the wain,
For all of Goldilocks are fain.

But when they came to the Fathers' door,
There stood his mother old and hoar.

Yet was her hair with grey but blent,
When forth from the Upland Town he went.

There by the door his sisters stood;
Full fair they were and fresh of blood;

Little they were when he went away;
Now each is meet for a young man's may.

"O tell me, Goldilocks, my son,
What are the deeds that thou has done?"

"I have wooed me a wife in the forest wild,
And home I bring the Woodland Child."

"A little deed to do, O son,
So long awhile as thou wert gone."

"O mother, yet is the summer here
Now I bring aback my true-love dear.

"And therewith an Evil Thing have I slain;
Yet I come with the first-come harvest-wain."

"O Goldilocks, my son, my son!
How good is the deed that thou hast done?"

"But how long the time that is worn away!
Lo! white is my hair that was but grey.

"And lo these sisters here, thine own,
How tall, how meet for men-folk grown!

"Come, see thy kin in the feasting-hall,
And tell me if thou knowest them all!

"O son, O son, we are blithe and fain;
But the autumn drought, and the winter rain,

"The frost and the snow, and St. David's wind,
All these that were, time out of mind,

"All these a many times have been
Since thou the Upland Town hast seen."

Then never a word spake Goldilocks
Till they came adown from the wheaten shocks.

And there beside his love he stood
And he saw her body sweet and good.

Then round her love his arms he cast:
"The years are as a tale gone past.

"But many the years that yet shall be
Of the merry tale of thee and me.

"Come, love, and look on the Fathers' Hall,
And the folk of the kindred one and all!

"For now the Fathers' House is kind,
And all the ill is left behind.

"And Goldilocks and Goldilocks
Shall dwell in the land of the Wheaten Shocks."

THE SON'S SORROW.

From the Icelandic.

THE King has asked of his son so good,
"Why art thou hushed and heavy of mood?
O fair it is to ride abroad.
Thou playest not, and thou laughest not;
All thy good game is clean forgot."

"Sit thou beside me, father dear,
And the tale of my sorrow shalt thou hear.

"Thou sendedst me unto a far-off land,
And gavest me into a good Earl's hand.

"Now had this good Earl daughters seven,
The fairest of maidens under heaven.

"One brought me my meat when I should dine,
One cut and sewed my raiment fine.

"One washed and combed my yellow hair,
And one I fell to loving there.

"Befell it on so fair a day,
We minded us to sport and play.

"Down in a dale my horse bound I,
Bound on my saddle speedily.

"Bright red she was as the flickering flame
When to my saddle-bow she came.

"Beside my saddle-bow she stood,
'To flee with thee to my heart were good.'

"Kind was my horse and good to aid,
My love upon his back I laid.

"We gat us from the garth away,
And none was ware of us that day.

"But as we rode along the sand
Behold a barge lay by the land.

"So in that boat did we depart,
And rowed away right glad at heart.

"When we came to the dark wood and the shade
To raise the tent my true-love bade.

"Three sons my true-love bore me there,
And syne she died who was so dear.

"A grave I wrought her with my sword,
With my fair shield the mould I poured.

"First in the mould I laid my love,
Then all my sons her breast above.

"And I without must lie alone;
So from the place I gat me gone."

No man now shall stand on his feet
To love that love, to woo that sweet:
O fair it is to ride abroad.

GUNNAR'S HOWE ABOVE THE HOUSE AT
LITHEND.³⁴

YE who have come o'er the sea
to behold this grey minster of lands,
Whose floor is the tomb of time past,
and whose walls by the toil of dead hands
Show pictures amidst of the ruin
of deeds that have overpast death,
Stay by this tomb in a tomb
to ask of who lieth beneath.
Ah! the world changeth too soon,
that ye stand there with unbated breath,
As I name him that Gunnar of old,
who erst in the haymaking tide
Felt all the land fragrant and fresh,
as amidst of the edges he died.
Too swiftly fame fadeth away,
if ye tremble not lest once again
The grey mound should open and show him
glad-eyed without grudging or pain.
Little labour methinks to behold him
but the tale-teller laboured in vain.
Little labour for ears that may hearken
to hear his death-conquering song,
Till the heart swells to think of the gladness
undying that overcame wrong.
O young is the world yet meseemeth
and the hope of it flourishing green,
When the words of a man unremembered

so bridge all the days that have been,
As we look round about on the land
that these nine hundred years he hath seen.

Dusk is abroad on the grass
of this valley amidst of the hill:
Dusk that shall never be dark
till the dawn hard on midnight shall fill
The trench under Eyiafell's snow,
and the grey plain the sea meeteth grey.
White, high aloft hangs the moon
that no dark night shall brighten ere day,
For here day and night toileth the summer
lest deedless his time pass away.

THE FOLK-MOTE BY THE RIVER.³⁵

It was up in the morn we rose betimes
From the hall-floor hard by the row of limes.

It was but John the Red and I,
And we were the brethren of Gregory;

And Gregory the Wright was one
Of the valiant men beneath the sun,

And what he bade us that we did
For ne'er he kept his counsel hid.

So out we went, and the clattering latch
Woke up the swallows under the thatch.

It was dark in the porch, but our scythes we felt,
And thrust the whetstone under the belt.

Through the cold garden boughs we went
Where the tumbling roses shed their scent.

Then out a-gates and away we strode
O'er the dewy straws on the dusty road,

And there was the mead by the town-reeve's close
Where the hedge was sweet with the wilding rose.

Then into the mowing grass we went
Ere the very last of the night was spent.

Young was the moon, and he was gone,
So we whet our scythes by the stars alone:

But or ever the long blades felt the hay
Afar in the East the dawn was grey.

Or ever we struck our earliest stroke
The thrush in the hawthorn-bush awoke.

While yet the bloom of the swathe was dim
The blackbird's bill had answered him.

Ere half of the road to the river was shorn
The sunbeam smote the twisted thorn.

Now wide was the way 'twixt the standing grass
For the townsfolk unto the mote to pass,

And so when all our work was done
We sat to breakfast in the sun,

While down in the stream the dragon-fly
'Twixt the quivering rushes flickered by ;

And though our knives shone sharp and white
The swift bleak heeded not the sight.

So when the bread was done away
We looked along the new-shorn hay,

And heard the voice of the gathering-horn
Come over the garden and the corn ;

For the wind was in the blossoming wheat
And drave the bees in the lime-boughs sweet.

Then loud was the horn's voice drawing near,
And it hid the talk of the prattling weir.

And now was the horn on the pathway wide
That we had shorn to the river-side.

So up we stood, and wide around
We sheared a space by the Elders' Mound;

And at the feet thereof it was
That highest grew the June-tide grass;

And over all the mound it grew
With clover blent, and dark of hue.

But never aught of the Elders' Hay
To rick or barn was borne away.

But it was bound and burned to ash
In the barren close by the reedy plash.

For 'neath that mound the valiant dead
Lay hearkening words of valiance said

When wise men stood on the Elders' Mound,
And the swords were shining bright around.

And now we saw the banners borne
On the first of the way that we had shorn;
So we laid the scythe upon the sward
And girt us to the battle-sword.

For after the banners well we knew
Were the freemen wending two and two.

There then that highway of the scythe
With many a hue was brave and blythe.

And first below the Silver Chief
Upon the green was the golden sheaf.

And on the next that went by it
The White Hart in the Park did sit.

Then on the red the White Wings flew,
And on the White was the Cloud-fleck blue.

Last went the Anchor of the Wrights
Beside the Ship of the Faring-Knights.

Then thronged the folk the June-tide field
With naked sword and painted shield,

Till they came adown to the river-side,
And there by the mound did they abide.

Now when the swords stood thick and white
As the mace reeds stand in the streamless bight,

There rose a man on the mound alone
And over his head was the grey mail done,

When over the new-shorn place of the field
Was nought but the steel hood and the shield.

The face on the mound shone ruddy and hale,
But the hoar hair showed from the hoary mail.

And there rose a hand by the ruddy face
And shook a sword o'er the peopled place.

And there came a voice from the mound and said :
"O sons, the days of my youth are dead,

"And gone are the faces I have known
In the street and the booths of the goodly town.

"O sons, full many a flock have I seen
Feed down this water-girdled green.

"Full many a herd of long-horned neat
Have I seen 'twixt water-side and wheat.

"Here by this water-side full oft
Have I heaved the flowery hay aloft.

"And oft this water-side anigh
Have I bowed adown the wheat-stalks high.

"And yet meseems I live and learn
And lore of younglings yet must earn.

“For tell me, children, whose are these
Fair meadows of the June’s increase ?

“Whose are these flocks and whose the neat,
And whose the acres of the wheat ?”

Scarce did we hear his latest word,
On the wide shield so rang the sword.

So rang the sword upon the shield
That the lark was hushed above the field.

Then sank the shouts and again we heard
The old voice come from the hoary beard :

“Yea, whose are yonder gables then,
And whose the holy hearths of men ?
Whose are the prattling children there,
And whose the sunburnt maids and fair ?

“Whose thralls are ye, hereby that stand,
Bearing the freeman’s sword in hand ?”

As glitters the sun in the rain-washed grass,
So in the tossing swords it was ;

As the thunder rattles along and adown
E’en so was the voice of the weaponed town.

And there was the steel of the old man’s sword,
And there was his hollow voice, and his word :

“Many men, many minds, the old saw saith,
Though hereof ye be sure as death.

“For what spake the herald yestermorn
But this, that ye were thrall-folk born ;

“That the lord that owneth all and some
Would send his men to fetch us home

“Betwixt the haysel, and the tide
When they shear the corn in the country-side ?

“O children, Who was the lord? ye say,
What prayer to him did our fathers pray?

“Did they hold out hands his gyves to bear?
Did their knees his high hall’s pavement wear?

“Is his house built up in heaven aloft?
Doth he make the sun rise oft and oft?

“Doth he hold the rain in his hollow hand?
Hath he cleft this water through the land?

“Or doth he stay the summer-tide,
And make the winter days abide?

“O children, Who is the lord? ye say,
Have we heard his name before to-day?

“O children, if his name I know,
He hight Earl Hugh of the Shivering Low:

“For that herald bore on back and breast
The Black Burg under the Eagle’s Nest.”

As the voice of the winter wind that tears
At the eaves of the thatch and its emptied ears,

E’en so was the voice of laughter and scorn
By the water-side in the mead new-shorn;

And over the garden and the wheat
Went the voice of women shrilly-sweet.

But now by the hoary elder stood
A carle in raiment red as blood.

Red was his weed and his glaive was white,
And there stood Gregory the Wright.

So he spake in a voice was loud and strong:
“Young is the day though the road is long;

"There is time if we tarry not at all
For the kiss in the porch and the meat in the hall.

"And safe shall our maidens sit at home
For the foe by the way we wend must come.

"Through the three Lavers shall we go
And raise them all against the foe.

"Then shall we wend the Downland ways,
And all the shepherd spearmen raise.

"To Cheaping Raynes shall we come adown
And gather the bowmen of the town ;

"And Greenstead next we come unto
Wherein are all folk good and true.

"When we come our ways to the Outer Wood
We shall be an host both great and good ;

"Yea when we come to the open field
There shall be a many under shield.

"And maybe Earl Hugh shall lie alow
And yet to the house of Heaven shall go.

"But we shall dwell in the land we love
And grudge no hallow Heaven above.

"Come ye, who think the time o'er long
Till we have slain the word of wrong !

"Come ye who deem the life of fear
On this last day hath drawn o'er near !

"Come after me upon the road
That leadeth to the Erne's abode."

Down then he leapt from off the mound
And back drew they that were around

Till he was foremost of all those
Betwixt the river and the close.

And uprose shouts both glad and strong
As followed after all the throng;

And overhead the banners flapped,
As we went on our ways to all that happed.

The fields before the Shivering Low
Of many a grief of manfolk know;

There may the autumn acres tell
Of how men met, and what befell.

The Black Burg under the Eagle's nest
Shall tell the tale as it liketh best.

And sooth it is that the River-land
Lacks many an autumn-gathering hand.

And there are troth-plight maids unwed
Shall deem a while that love is dead;

And babes there are to men shall grow
Nor ever the face of their fathers know.

And yet in the Land by the River-side
Doth never a thrall or an earl's man bide;

For Hugh the Earl of might and mirth
Hath left the merry days of Earth;

And we live on in the land we love,
And grudge no hallow Heaven above.

THE BURGHERS' BATTLE.³⁶

THICK rise the spear-shafts o'er the land
That erst the harvest bore;
The sword is heavy in the hand,
And we return no more.

The light wind waves the Ruddy Fox,
Our banner of the war,
And ripples in the Running Ox,
And we return no more.

Across our stubble acres now
The teams go four and four;
But out-worn elders guide the plough,
And we return no more.

And now the women heavy-eyed
Turn through the open door
From gazing down the highway wide,
Where we return no more.

The shadows of the fruited close
Dapple the feast-hall floor;
There lie our dogs and dream and doze,
And we return no more.

Down from the minster tower to-day
Fall the soft chimes of yore
Amidst the chattering jackdaws' play:
And we return no more.

But underneath the streets are still;
Noon, and the market's o'er!
Back go the goodwives o'er the hill;
For we return no more.

What merchant to our gates shall come?
What wise man bring us lore?
What abbot ride away to Rome,
Now we return no more?

What mayor shall rule the hall we built?
Whose scarlet sweep the floor?
What judge shall doom the robber's guilt,
Now we return no more?

New houses in the street shall rise
Where builded we before,
Of other stone wrought otherwise;
For we return no more.

And crops shall cover field and hill
Unlike what once they bore,
And all be done without our will,
Now we return no more.

Look up! the arrows streak the sky,
The horns of battle roar;
The long spears lower and draw nigh,
And we return no more.

Remember how beside the wain,
We spoke the word of war,
And sowed this harvest of the plain,
And we return no more.

Lay spears about the Ruddy Fox!
The days of old are o'er;
Heave sword about the Running Ox!
For we return no more.

THE VOICE OF TOIL.³⁷

I HEARD men saying, Leave hope and praying,
All days shall be as all have been;
To-day and to-morrow bring fear and sorrow,
The never-ending toil between.

When Earth was younger mid toil and hunger,
In hope we strove, and our hands were strong;
Then great men led us, with words they fed us,
And bade us right the earthly wrong.

Go read in story their deeds and glory,
Their names amidst the nameless dead;
Turn then from lying to us slow-dying
In that good world to which they led;

Where fast and faster our iron master,
The thing we made, for ever drives,
Bids us grind treasure and fashion pleasure
For other hopes and other lives.

Where home is a hovel and dull we grovel,
Forgetting that the world is fair;
Where no babe we cherish, lest its very soul perish;
Where mirth is crime, and love a snare.

Who now shall lead us, what god shall heed us
As we lie in the hell our hands have won?
For us are no rulers but fools and befoolers,
The great are fallen, the wise men gone.

I heard men saying, Leave tears and praying,
The sharp knife heedeth not the sheep;
Are we not stronger than the rich and the wronger,
When day breaks over dreams and sleep?

Come, shoulder to shoulder ere the world grows older!
Help lies in nought but thee and me;
Hope is before us, the long years that bore us
Bore leaders more than men may be.

Let dead hearts tarry and trade and marry,
And trembling nurse their dreams of mirth,
While we the living our lives are giving
To bring the bright new world to birth.

Come, shoulder to shoulder ere earth grows older!
The Cause spreads over land and sea;
Now the world shaketh, and fear awaketh,
And joy at last for thee and me.

THE DAY IS COMING.

COME hither, lads, and hearken,
for a tale there is to tell,
Of the wonderful days a-coming, when all
shall be better than well.

And the tale shall be told of a country,
a land in the midst of the sea,
And folk shall call it England
in the days that are going to be.

There more than one in a thousand
in the days that are yet to come,
Shall have some hope of the morrow,
some joy of the ancient home.

For then, laugh not, but listen
to this strange tale of mine,
All folk that are in England
shall be better lodged than swine.

Then a man shall work and bethink him,
and rejoice in the deeds of his hand,
Nor yet come home in the even
too faint and weary to stand.

Men in that time a-coming
shall work and have no fear
For to-morrow's lack of earning
and the hunger-wolf anear.

I tell you this for a wonder,
that no man then shall be glad
Of his fellow's fall and mishap
to snatch at the work he had.

For that which the worker winneth
shall then be his indeed,
Nor shall half be reaped for nothing
by him that sowed no seed.

O strange new wonderful justice !
But for whom shall we gather the gain ?
For ourselves and for each of our fellows,
and no hand shall labour in vain.

Then all Mine and all Thine shall be Ours,
and no more shall any man crave
For riches that serve for nothing
but to fetter a friend for a slave.

And what wealth then shall be left us
when none shall gather gold
To buy his friend in the market,
and pinch and pine the sold ?

Nay, what save the lovely city,
and the little house on the hill,
And the waste and the woodland beauty,
and the happy fields we till;

And the homes of ancient stories,
the tombs of the mighty dead;
And the wise men seeking out marvels,
and the poet's teeming head;

And the painter's hand of wonder;
and the marvellous fiddle-bow,
And the banded choirs of music:
all those that do and know.

For all these shall be ours and all men's,
nor shall any lack a share
Of the toil and the gain of living
in the days when the world grows fair.

Ah! such are the days that shall be!
But what are the deeds of to-day
In the days of the years we dwell in,
that wear our lives away?

Why, then, and for what are we waiting?
There are three words to speak;
WE WILL IT, and what is the foeman
but the dream-strong wakened and weak?

O why and for what are we waiting?
while our brothers droop and die,
And on every wind of the heavens
a wasted life goes by.

How long shall they reproach us
where crowd on crowd they dwell,
Poor ghosts of the wicked city,
the gold-crushed hungry hell?

Through squalid life they laboured,
in sordid grief they died,
Those sons of a mighty mother,
those props of England's pride.

They are gone ; there is none can undo it,
nor save our souls from the curse ;
But many a million cometh,
and shall they be better or worse ?

It is we must answer and hasten,
and open wide the door
For the rich man's hurrying terror,
and the slow-foot hope of the poor.

Yea, the voiceless wrath of the wretched,
and their unlearned discontent,
We must give it voice and wisdom
till the waiting-tide be spent.

Come, then, since all things call us,
the living and the dead,
And o'er the weltering tangle
a glimmering light is shed.

Come, then, let us cast off fooling,
and put by ease and rest,
For the Cause alone is worthy
till the good days bring the best.

Come, join in the only battle
wherein no man can fail,
Where whoso fadeth and dieth,
yet his deed shall still prevail.

Ah ! come, cast off all fooling,
for this, at least, we know :
That the Dawn and the Day is coming,
and forth the Banners go.

THE MESSAGE OF THE MARCH WIND.³⁸

FAIR now is the spring-tide, now earth lies beholding
With the eyes of a lover, the face of the sun ;
Long lasteth the daylight, and hope is enfolding
The green-growing acres with increase begun.

Now sweet, sweet it is through the land to be straying
'Mid the birds and the blossoms and the beasts of the
field;

Love mingles with love, and no evil is weighing
On thy heart or mine, where all sorrow is healed.

From township to township, o'er down and by tillage
Fair, far have we wandered and long was the day;
But now cometh eve at the end of the village,
Where over the grey wall the church riseth grey.

There is wind in the twilight; in the white road before us
The straw from the ox-yard is blowing about;
The moon's rim is rising, a star glitters o'er us,
And the vane on the spire-top is swinging in doubt.

Down there dips the highway, toward the bridge cross-
ing over
The brook that runs on to the Thames and the sea.
Draw closer, my sweet, we are lover and lover;
This eve art thou given to gladness and me.

Shall we be glad always? Come closer and hearken:
Three fields further on, as they told me down there,
When the young moon has set, if the March sky should
darken,
We might see from the hill-top the great city's glare.

Hark, the wind in the elm-boughs! from London it
bloweth,
And telleth of gold, and of hope and unrest;
Of power that helps not; of wisdom that knoweth,
But teacheth not aught of the worst and the best.

Of the rich men it telleth, and strange is the story
How they have, and they hanker, and grip far and wide;
And they live and they die, and the earth and its glory
Has been but a burden they scarce might abide.

Hark! the March wind again of a people is telling;
Of the life that they live there, so haggard and grim,
That if we and our love amidst them had been dwelling
My fondness had faltered, thy beauty grown dim.

This land we have loved in our love and our leisure
For them hangs in heaven, high out of their reach;
The wide hills o'er the sea-plain for them have no
pleasure,
The grey homes of their fathers no story to teach.

The singers have sung and the builders have builded,
The painters have fashioned their tales of delight;
For what and for whom hath the world's book been
gilded,
When all is for these but the blackness of night?

How long, and for what is their patience abiding?
How oft and how oft shall their story be told,
While the hope that none seeketh in darkness is hiding,
And in grief and in sorrow the world groweth old?

Come back to the inn, love, and the lights and the fire,
And the fiddler's old tune and the shuffling of feet;
For there in a while shall be rest and desire,
And there shall the morrow's uprising be sweet.

Yet, love, as we wend, the wind bloweth behind us,
And beareth the last tale it telleth to-night,
How here in the spring-tide the message shall find us;
For the hope that none seeketh is coming to light.

Like the seed of mid-winter, unheeded, unperished,
Like the autumn-sown wheat 'neath the snow lying
green,
Like the love that o'ertook us, unawares and uncherished,
Like the babe 'neath thy girdle that groweth unseen;

So the hope of the people now buddeth and groweth,
Rest fadeth before it, and blindness and fear;
It biddeth us learn all the wisdom it knoweth;
It hath found us and held us, and biddeth us hear:

For it beareth the message: "Rise up on the morrow
And go on your ways toward the doubt and the strife;
Join hope to our hope and blend sorrow with sorrow,
And seek for men's love in the short days of life."

But lo, the old inn, and the lights and the fire,
And the fiddler's old tune and the shuffling of feet;
Soon for us shall be quiet and rest and desire,
And to-morrow's uprising to deeds shall be sweet.

DRAWING NEAR THE LIGHT.

Lo, when we wade the tangled wood,
In haste and hurry to be there,
Nought seem its leaves and blossoms good,
For all that they be fashioned fair.

But looking up, at last we see
The glimmer of the open light,
From o'er the place where we would be:
Then grow the very brambles bright.

So now, amidst our day of strife,
With many a matter glad we play,
When once we see the light of life
Gleam through the tangle of to-day.

MINE AND THINE.

From a Flemish Poem of the Fourteenth Century.

Two words about the world we see,
And nought but Mine and Thine they be.
Ah! might we drive them forth and wide
With us should rest and peace abide;
All free, nought owned of goods and gear,
By men and women though it were.
Common to all all wheat and wine
Over the seas and up the Rhine.
No manslayer then the wide world o'er
When Mine and Thine are known no more.
Yea, God, well counselled for our health,
Gave all this fleeting earthly wealth
A common heritage to all,
That men might feed them therewithal,

And clothe their limbs and shoe their feet
And live a simple life and sweet.
But now so rageth greediness
That each desireth nothing less
Than all the world, and all his own;
And all for him and him alone.

A DEATH SONG.³⁹

WHAT cometh here from west to east awending?
And who are these, the marchers stern and slow?
We bear the message that the rich are sending
Aback to those who bade them wake and know.
*Not one, not one, nor thousands must they slay,
But one and all if they would dusk the day.*

We ask them for a life of toilsome earning,
They bade us bide their leisure for our bread;
We crave to speak to tell our woeful learning:
We come back speechless, bearing back our dead.
*Not one, not one, nor thousands must they slay,
But one and all if they would dusk the day.*

They will not learn; they have no ears to hearken.
They turn their faces from the eyes of fate;
Their gay-lit halls shut out the skies that darken.
But, lo! this dead man knocking at the gate.
*Not one, not one, nor thousands must they slay,
But one and all if they would dusk the day.*

Here lies the sign that we shall break our prison;
Amidst the storm he won a prisoner's rest;
But in the cloudy dawn the sun arisen
Brings us our day of work to win the best.
*Not one, not one, nor thousands must they slay,
But one and all if they would dusk the day.*

DOWN AMONG THE DEAD MEN.

COME, comrades, come, your glasses clink;
Up with your hands a health to drink,
The health of all that workers be,
In every land, on every sea.
 And he that will this health deny,
 Down among the dead men, down among the dead men,
 Down, down, down, down,
 Down among the dead men let him lie!

Well done! now drink another toast,
And pledge the gath'ring of the host,
The people armed in brain and hand,
To claim their rights in every land.
 And he that will, etc.

There's liquor left; come, let's be kind,
And drink the rich a better mind,
That when we knock upon the door,
They may be off and say no more.
 And he that will, etc.

Now, comrades, let the glass blush red,
Drink we the unforgotten dead
That did their deeds and went away,
Before the bright sun brought the day.
 And he that will, etc.

The Day? Ah, friends, late grows the night;
Drink to the glimmering spark of light,
The herald of the joy to be,
The battle torch of thee and me!
 And he that will, etc.

Take yet another cup in hand
And drink in hope our little band;
Drink strife in hope while lasteth breath,
And brotherhood in life and death;
 And he that will, etc.

SONGS FROM LOVE IS ENOUGH.⁴⁰

SONG FOR MUSIC.

Love is enough : though the world be a-waning
 And the woods have no voice but the voice of complaining,
 Though the sky be too dark for dim eyes to discover
 The gold-cups and daisies fair blooming thereunder,
 Though the hills be held shadows, and the sea a dark
 wonder,
 And this day draw a veil over all deeds passed over,
 Yet their hands shall not tremble, their feet shall not
 falter,
 The void shall not weary, the fear shall not alter
 These lips and these eyes of the loved and the lover.

SONG FOR MUSIC.

Love is enough : it grew up without heeding
 In the days when ye knew not its name nor its measure,
 And its leaflets untrodden by the light feet of pleasure
 Had no boast of the blossom, no sign of the seeding,
 As the morning and evening passed over its treasure.

And what do ye say then ? — that Spring long departed
 Has brought forth no child to the softness and showers ;
 — That we slept and we dreamed through the Summer of
 flowers ;
 We dreamed of the Winter, and waking dead-hearted
 Found Winter upon us and waste of dull hours.

Nay, Spring was o'er happy and knew not the reason,
 And Summer dreamed sadly, for she thought all was
 ended
 In her fulness of wealth that might not be amended ;
 But this is the harvest and the garnering season,
 And the leaf and the blossom in the ripe fruit are
 blended.

It sprang without sowing, it grew without heeding,
 Ye knew not its name and ye knew not its measure,
 Ye noted it not mid your hope and your pleasure ;
 There was pain in its blossom, despair in its seeding,
 But daylong your bosom now nurseth its treasure.

SONG FOR MUSIC.

Dawn talks to-day
 Over dew-gleaming flowers,
 Night flies away
 Till the resting of hours :
 Fresh are thy feet
 And with dreams thine eyes glistening,
 Thy still lips are sweet
 Though the world is a-listening.
 O Love, set a word in my mouth for our meeting,
 Cast thine arms round about me to stay my heart's beating!
 O fresh day, O fair day, O long day made ours !

Morn shall meet noon
 While the flower-stems yet move,
 Though the wind dieth soon
 And the clouds fade above.
 Loved lips are thine
 As I tremble and hearken ;
 Bright thine eyes shine,
 Though the leaves thy brow darken.
 O Love, kiss me into silence, lest no word avail me,
 Stay my head with thy bosom lest breath and life fail me !
 O sweet day, O rich day, made long for our love !

Late day shall greet eve,
 And the full blossoms shake,
 For the wind will not leave
 The tall trees while they wake.
 Eyes soft with bliss,
 Come nigher and nigher !
 Sweet mouth I kiss,
 Tell me all thy desire !
 Let us speak, love, together some words of our story,
 That our lips as they part may remember the glory !
 O soft day, O calm day, made clear for our sake !

Eve shall kiss night,
 And the leaves stir like rain
 As the wind stealeth light
 O'er the grass of the plain.
 Unseen are thine eyes
 Mid the dreamy night's sleeping,
 And on my mouth there lies
 The dear rain of thy weeping.
 Hold, silence, love, speak not of the sweet day departed,
 Cling close to me, love, lest I waken sad-hearted !
 O kind day, O dear day, short day, come again !

VERSES FOR A BED HANGING.^a

THE wind 's on the wold,
 And the night is a-cold,
 And Thames runs Chill
 'Twixt mead and hill.
 But kind and dear
 Is the old house here,
 And my heart is warm
 'Midst winter's harm.

Rest, then, and rest,
 And think of the best.
 'Twixt summer and spring
 When all birds sing
 In the town of the tree ;
 And ye lie in me,
 And scarce dare move
 Lest earth and its love
 Should fade away
 Ere the full of the day.

I am old, and have seen
 Many things that have been,
 Both quiet and peace,
 And wane and increase ;
 No tale I tell
 Of ill or well,
 But this I say,
 Night treadeth on day
 And for worst and best
 Right good is rest.

A LIFE scarce worth the living, a poor fame
 Scarce worth the winning, in a wretched land,
 Where fear and pain go upon either hand,
 As toward the end men fare without an aim
 Unto the dull grey dark from whence they came;
 Let them alone, the unshadowed sheer rocks stand
 Over the twilight graves of that poor band,
 Who count so little in the great world's game!

Nay, with the dead I deal not; this man lives,
 And that which carried him through good and ill,
 Stern against fate, while his voice echoed still
 From rock to rock, now he lies silent, strives
 With wasting time, and through its long lapse gives
 Another friend to me, life's void to fill.

—FACING TITLE-PAGE OF "THE STORY OF GRETTER
 THE STRONG."

WHILES carried o'er the iron road,
 We hurry by some fair abode;
 The garden bright amidst the hay,
 The yellow wain upon the way,
 The dining men, the wind that sweeps
 Light locks from off the sun-sweet heaps —
 The gable grey, the hoary roof,
 Here now — and now so far aloof.
 How sorely then we long to stay
 And midst its sweetness wear the day,
 And 'neath its changing shadows sit,
 And feel ourselves a part of it.
 Such rest, such stay, I strove to win
 With these same leaves that lie herein.

—TITLE-PAGE TO "THE ROOTS OF THE MOUNTAINS."

WHILES in the early winter eve
 We pass amid the gathering night
 Some homestead that we had to leave
 Years past; and see its candles bright
 Shine in the room beside the door
 Where we were merry years ago

But now must never enter more,
As still the dark road drives us on.
E'en so the world of men may turn
At even of some hurried day
And see the ancient glimmer burn
Across the waste that hath no way;
Then with that faint light in its eyes
Awhile I bid it linger near
And nurse in wavering memories
The bitter-sweet of days that were.

—TITLE-PAGE TO "THE HOUSE OF THE WOLFINGS."

"MASTERS IN THIS HALL" ⁴²

1

MASTERS in this Hall,
Hear ye news to-day
Brought from over fea,
And ever I you pray.
Chorus: Now-ell! Now-ell! Now-ell!
Now-ell fing we clear!
Hol-pen are all folk on earth,
Born is GOD'S SON fo dear:
Now-ell! Now-ell! Now-ell!
Now-ell fing we loud!
God to-day hath poor folk raif'd,
And caft a-down the proud.

2

Going over the hills,
Through the milk-white fnow,
Heard I ewes bleat
While the wind did blow.
Chorus: Nowell, etc.

3

Shepherds many an one
Sat among the fheep,
No man fpake more word
Than they had been afleep.
Chorus: Nowell, etc.

4

Quoth I, "Fellows mine,
Why this guife fit ye?
Making but dull cheer,
Shepherds though ye be?"
Chorus: Nowell, etc.

5

"Shepherds fould of right
Leap and dance and fing,
Thus to fee ye fit,
Is a right ftrange thing."
Chorus: Nowell, etc.

6

Quoth thefe fellows then,
"To Bethlem Town we go,
To fee a Mighty LORD
Lie in manger low."
Chorus: Nowell, etc.

7

"How name ye thif LORD,
Shepherds?" then faid I,
"Very GOD," they faid,
"Come from Heaven high."
Chorus: Nowell, etc.

8

Then to Bethlem town
We went two and two,
And in a forry place
Heard the oxen low.
Chorus: Nowell, etc.

9

Therein did we fee
A fweet and goodly May
And a fair old man,
Upon the ftraw She lay.
Chorus: Nowell, etc.

10

And a little CHILD

On Her arm had She,

"Wot ye Who This is?"

Said the hinds to me.

Chorus: Nowell, etc.

11

Ox and afs Him know,

Kneeling on their knee,

Wondrous joy had I

This little BABE to fee.

Chorus: Nowell, etc.

12

This is CHRIST the LORD

Mafters be ye glad!

Chriftmas is come in,

And no folk fhould be fad.

Chorus: Nowell, etc.

NOTES.

1. THE DEFENCE OF GUENEVERE.

IN this first of Morris's published poems (1858) the character of the queen is conceived in the genuine mediæval spirit, hot and passionate, and far more intimately human than in Tennyson's *Idylls*. The poet has chosen the intensely dramatic moment when the queen is before her judges at Carlisle, about to be "brent at the stake" for "treason." In the twentieth book of Malory's *Morte Darthur*, in chapters i. to viii., it is related how Sir Agravaine and Sir Mordred entrapped Sir Launcelot by night in Queen Guenevere's chamber; how Launcelot was unarmed save for his sword, and how he slew Sir Colgrevice by stratagem and armed himself in his armour, and so slew Agravaine and twelve other knights that were with him and wounded Mordred, but Mordred escaped to the king and told him of the affray; how the king mourned for the death of his knights and condemned the queen to be burnt as "causer" of their deaths, and also because she was untrue to him; "and how Sir Launcelot and his kinsmen rescued the queen from the fire, and how he slew many knights." In Malory, however, there is no mention of Gawaine, or Gauwaine, as the queen's accuser. He rather advises the king strongly against this extreme measure which resulted in the final estrangement of Launcelot and the overthrow of Arthur himself. On p. 10, l. 4, "shent" = destroyed.

2. KING ARTHUR'S TOMB.

IN the twenty-first book of Sir Thomas Malory, in the ninth and tenth chapters, it is told how, after the wars between King Arthur and Sir Launcelot, and the battle between Sir Mordred and Arthur, in which Arthur and Mordred, and all the remaining knights of the Round Table, were slain, save only Sir Bedivere and those that had left Arthur and held by Sir Launcelot; then Sir Launcelot came into England with Sir Bors and a great following; how he learned of the death of Arthur, and how he sought, alone, for the queen, and finally found her in a nunnery at Almesbury; how she bade him a solemn farewell, and how they departed one from another. It is a stroke of genius that doubles the dramatic power of this scene by changing its location to Arthur's tomb at Glastonbury.

3. SIR PETER HARPDON'S END.

This dramatic romance utters, with touches of genuine lyric passion, the pathos of the life men lived in the days that John Froissart chronicled. In the pages of the garrulous old Canon mention is made of a Sir John Harpdon, whose lady held the castle of Fontenay le Comte for a time against the constable of France, but, beyond this barren surname, I find no tangible historical basis for the story. Yet the situation, so vividly realized, is perfectly typical historical truth in incident and emotion, if not historical fact. Sir William Grville captured the city of Evreux by a stratagem — hiding an axe under his cloak and using it on the head of the governor during a friendly conversation — that, perhaps, suggested Lambert's attempted treachery in the poem.

4. RAPUNZEL.

In the familiar "Household" collection of the Brothers Grimm, the story of Rapunzel is told, essentially, as follows: A man lived with his wife near the house of a witch. The wife desired radishes from the witch's garden, which her husband was obliged to steal for her. The witch caught him, but remitted punishment upon condition that she be given the rearing of his unborn daughter. She took the child, named her Rapunzel, and immured her in a lonely tower, built of stone, in a great forest, with no opening except a little window in the roof. Through this, at the witch's command, Rapunzel was wont to let down her long golden hair so that her tormenter might climb up and visit her. The prince, wandering that way in the forest, saw the fair prisoner, loved her, spied upon the witch, and then, in her absence, went beneath the tower and called, "Rapunzel, Rapunzel, let down your hair!" Rapunzel, thinking it was the witch that called, obeyed. Thus the prince visited her often. They planned her escape, but before it could be accomplished, the witch discovered their plan, carried the maiden away into the midst of a desert, and frightened the prince so that he jumped from the tower top into a thorn-bush and was blinded. He wandered at random through the world, and by chance came upon Rapunzel in her solitude. Her tears fell upon his blinded eyes and cured them. And the prince and Rapunzel lived happily ever after.

It is interesting to see what a small part of this very simple story Morris has chosen, and how characteristically he has wrought the semi-dramatic form with sensuous colour and vague imagery, till the effect is an atmosphere half mediæval, half of dreamland.

The prince's song, with the "Guendolen" refrain (p. 57), was first printed in the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*, July, 1856, under the title "Hands." The only changes in the later printing are mere alterations of word order — in the second line of the second stanza where "rippled yellow hair" is altered to "yellow rippled hair," a distinct improvement in the rhythm, and in the third stanza where the first and second lines are interchanged.

5-7. CONCERNING GEFFRAY TESTE NOIRE.

The Teste Noire of the poem is a type of a great number of free-booting men-at-arms who, "under the shadow of the English name," preyed upon the rich fields and villages and the helpless, industrious peasantry of Brittany and Gascony in the troubled days of the Hundred Years' War, when the English and their Navarrese allies held the realm of France a fair booty for their swords. The incident is typical, rather than historical, and faithfully reproduces the military atmosphere of the period.

"Blackhead" himself, however, is a genuine, historical, character. See Froissart's *Chronicles*, vol. ii. ch. 33, wherein it is related that the castle of Ventadour was "sold or betrayed to the most cruel of all Bretons, Geoffry Tete-Noire," who with his troops kept possession of Ventadour, from whence they ravaged the country; also, vol. ii. p. 315, and pp. 323 and 387, how Sir John Bonne Lance besieged Ventadour, and how at last Geoffry died, and was succeeded in his power by his nephews, "Alleyne Roux and Peter Roux."

The reminiscence, in ll. 99 *et seq.* (p. 60), of the Jacquerie of Beauvais, refers to a historical outbreak of the French peasantry about the year 1357. The peasants of this period were miserable wretches, serfs of the soil, treated by their masters at best as on a par with their other animal possessions. They seem to have been ferocious beasts when they were turned loose. Their misery was aggravated beyond endurance by the depredations of the contending parties, which were so often repeated that large tracts of country were utterly desolated, and the yokels reduced to nakedness and starvation. In desperation they turned upon all gentlefolk, and were successful for a time in their career of plunder and revenge. John Froissart says of them (*Johnes Translation*, vol. i. ch. 181): "These wicked people, without leader and without arms, plundered and burnt all the houses they came to, murdered every gentleman, and violated every lady or damsel they could find. He who committed the most atrocious actions, and such as no human creature would have imagined, was the most applauded, and considered as the greatest man among them. I dare not write the horrible and inconceivable atrocities they committed on the persons of the ladies. . . . In the bishoprics of Noyon, Laon, and Soissons, there were upwards of one hundred castles and good houses of knights and squires destroyed."

The gentlemen of the territories infested by these vermin soon took severe measures against them, cutting them down without mercy, or hanging them to trees in large numbers. The king of Navarre destroyed in one day, "near Clermont in Beauvoisis, upwards of three thousand." At Meaux, in Bire, the Capital of Buch, and the Earl of Foix, finally discomfited the "Jacks," slaying seven thousand of them, throwing them in great heaps into the river, and finally burning the town with a great number of the peasants shut up in it.

8. THE EVE OF CRÉCY.

As the preceding *Shameful Death* expresses the grimness of the age of chivalry, and the following ballad, *The Gilliflower of Gold*, the pathos of a mediæval holiday, so the *Eve of Crécy* sings the hope of the knightly freebooter. The following quotation is eloquent of the chances of war.

Before the battle of Auray (Froissart, vol. i. ch. 226): "In the course of this evening, some English knights and squires earnestly begged of Sir John Chandos that he would not listen to any overtures of peace between the Earl of Montfort and Lord Charles de Blois, for they had expended their whole fortune, and were so poor that they hoped, by means of a battle, either to lose their all or to set themselves up again. The knight assented to the request."

And a few pages later: "Sir Ralph Neville served under Sir John Chandos with thirty lances, at his own expense and charges, out of what he had gained at the battle of Auray."

9. RIDING TOGETHER.

This poem, with its haunting feminine rhyme, first appeared in the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine* for May, 1856. In spirit and in metrical effects it bears a strong resemblance to *Winter Weather*, which had already been printed in the January number. The dramatic quality is strong in them, as indeed it is in all of these mediæval poems.

10. THE BLUE CLOSET *ET SEQ.*

Though the *Blue Closet*, written for a picture by Rossetti, is purely a dream poem, and *Praise of My Lady* a piece of pre-Raphaelite idealism, they both belong with the foregoing group of poems, by reason of their mysticism and vague pathos which are unmistakably of the mediæval inspiration.

The exquisite *Summer Dawn*, pure lyric, was first published in the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*, October, 1856, with the title, *Pray but One Prayer for Me*.

11. THE LIFE AND DEATH OF JASON.

The old Greek story of *The Quest of the Golden Fleece* was peculiarly interesting, because of its romantic nature, to Morris. He first planned the poem as one of the stories in the *Earthly Paradise*, but it expanded under his elaborate treatment until it entirely outgrew the limits of the original design and was published in June, 1867, as *The Life and Death of Jason*. It was the first of Morris's poems to achieve real popularity, running through eight editions. It is impossible by brief selections to give any adequate idea of the richness of detail and the power and scope of the narra-

tive. We have been content with including a few of the many lyrics which vary the measured sweep of the regular verse.

12. *A Garden by the Sea* is the song of the water-nymph who entices Hylas to the borders of the little Mysian river, and lulls him to sleep while her companions bear him down to their hidden home, so that he is lost forever to the light of day, and, with Hercules who wanders far and near in search of him, is left behind by the Argonauts who must follow their quest. The version here given is from *Poems by the Way*, and is changed from the original form as follows:—

Stanza 3, l. 2. — *close* is substituted for *place*.

l. 5. — read originally "The hills whose flowers ne'er fed the bee."

l. 6. — *Dark* is substituted for *The*.

l. 7. — *Tormented* is substituted for *Still beaten*.

l. 12. — *Whereby I grow* is substituted for *That maketh me*.

13. *O surely now the Fisherman* is a song of triumph and exhortation, sung by Orpheus, as his shipmates drive Argo, bearing Medea and the Golden Fleece away from the Colchian town of *Æa* and down the river Phasis toward the open sea.

14. The song, *Alas, for Saturn's Days of Gold!* is sung by Orpheus for the delight of his comrades camped at night on the shore of the unknown Northern river into which they ran when cut off from a direct return to Greece. It is interesting as a sort of mediæval dream of "The Golden Age."

15. *O Death, that maketh Life so Sweet* is another of the songs of Orpheus which were the inspiration of his comrades in their various times of trial. This is sung on the open Atlantic, after Argo has been drawn overland to a river leading to the Northern Sea, after a winter has been passed in the Northern forest, and when the Argonauts are tossing on the ocean, nigh the Pillars of Hercules.

16. *The Argonauts and the Sirens*. — Only a part is here given of the long antiphony between Orpheus and the Sirens. The introductory bit of narrative will serve to show the clear flowing quality which characterizes the verse of the whole poem.

17. The Tribute to Chaucer, from book xvii. of the poem, while not properly a song, possesses a beautiful lyric quality.

18. THE EARTHLY PARADISE.

The story cycle called *The Earthly Paradise* was written by Morris in pursuance of a long-considered design, in the years 1866–1869. The first volume, containing parts i. and ii., was issued in 1868, the second in 1869, and the third in 1870. Much might be said of the original plan and the deviations therefrom, of the growth of the poet from the romantic into the epic method, of the various sources from which the twenty-four stories are drawn; but here only the briefest statement can find place.

The general design was a cycle of stories drawing from all the different sources of ancient legend. The general method was confessedly Chaucerian, — straightforward, narrative verse, — but the execution is more romantic than Chaucer's; the poet is more given to

embroidery. Unity is secured for the whole cycle by the mediæval tone and setting which are used alike for Greek, Oriental, and Teutonic legends, and by that which justifies this mediæval treatment of classic themes, — a trick of construction like that used in the *Canterbury Tales*. A group of wanderers from Europe, in the Middle Ages, finds haven in an island of the sea peopled with a race preserving the classic Greek tradition; they beguile the days by relating these stories of old time. The method and spirit of this constructive prologue will be made clearer by quoting its argument and introductory lines.

PROLOGUE—THE WANDERERS.

ARGUMENT.

“Certain gentlemen and mariners of Norway, having considered all that they had heard of the Earthly Paradise, set sail to find it, and after many troubles and the lapse of many years came old men to some Western land, of which they had never before heard; there they died, when they had dwelt there certain years, much honoured of the strange people.

“Forget six counties overhung with smoke,
 Forget the snorting steam and piston stroke,
 Forget the spreading of the hideous town;
 Think rather of the pack horse on the down,
 And dream of London small and white and clean;
 The clear Thames bordered by its gardens green;
 Think that below bridge the green lapping waves
 Smite some few keels that bear Levantine staves,
 Cut from the yew wood on the burnt-up hill,
 And pointed jars that Greek hands toiled to fill,
 And treasured scanty spice from some far sea,
 Florence gold cloth, and Ypres napery,
 And cloth of Bruges, and hogsheads of Guienne;
 While nigh the thronged wharf Geoffrey Chaucer’s pen
 Moves over bills of lading — mid such times
 Shall dwell the hollow puppets of my rhymes.”

The *Apology*, which precedes the *Prologue*, and the lines from *The Author to the Reader*, which follow it, are eloquent, beyond any explanation, of the spirit and profound purpose of the whole work, and indeed of all of Morris’s poetry. *L’Envoi* (p. 107) is a lyrical tribute of surpassing beauty to that Chaucer whom Morris ever looked to with loving reverence as his “master” — not, be it remembered, his master in style or in versification, or even in methods of treating a theme, but in the great general principles of narrative poetry, a broad, romantic spirit, and the story-telling power.

19. *The Months*. The four parts of the *Earthly Paradise* correspond to the four seasons, and for each month there are two stories. The lyric stanzas which introduce each month are related to the stories only as the illuminations of an old missal are related to

the matter that is written therein. The stanzas for June recall a day spent by the poet with his family on the upper reaches of the Thames, by Eynsham, and the Wytham hills, in the summer of 1867. The lines for August were inspired by another river excursion in that same summer, down by Dorchester (see Mackail's *Life of William Morris*, p. 187). Those for October recall an autumn day at Southwold in 1868.

20. The song from *The Love of Alcestis* is sung by Apollo, the herdsman of King Admetus, who is doomed to serve on earth a year, exiled from Olympus by the wrath of Zeus.

21. The song from *Cupid and Psyche* is heard by Psyche as she wanders alone through the house of Cupid, wondering at each new thing that meets her eyes, wishing for music, and hearing then this song by an unseen choir.

22. *Atalanta's Race* is a beautiful retelling of the old Greek story that is too well known to need comment or explanation.

23. *Ogier the Dane* is Celtic in origin, taken by Morris from a French romance of the fourteenth century (this is stated upon the authority of the biographer).

24. *The Fostering of Aslaug*, the story of the daughter of Sigurd and Brynhild, is from Icelandic sources; its main facts were taken by Morris from Thorpe's *Northern Mythology* (vol. i. p. 109) before he became familiar, at first hand, with the *Volsunga Saga*.

These three tales have been selected from the twenty-four which compose the *Earthly Paradise*, because they adequately represent the three main sources from which the poet drew his material, and because certain others, — notably *The Lovers of Gudrun*, which is an epic in its own right and a superb rendering of the *Laxdæla Saga*, — that are intrinsically as excellent, are too long to find place in this collection.

25. SIGURD THE VOLSUNG.

Sigurd the Volsung, published 1876, is a verse-rendering of the prose *Volsunga Saga*, written in Iceland in the twelfth century, of which Morris had previously made a prose translation. This Icelandic story is the oldest form of the Teutonic race epic, the story of Siegfried, or Sigurd, and the Nibelungs, which is better known to the modern world through the Old High German *Nibelungenlied*, and Wagner's opera cycle, *Die Ring des Nibelungen*.

Morris's poem has the grandeur and breadth and many of the other qualities proper to a great epic, but is faulty in structure because it uses too much of the Saga material. The story of Sigmund and Signy and Sinfjotli, which fills two books preceding the birth of Sigurd, is tremendous in itself, but detracts from the unity of the complete poem, and forms too long a prelude to the great story of Sigurd and Brynhild and Gudrun. We have endeavoured to take from the poem passages long enough to represent adequately the power, the profound beauty of the narrative. It is impossible by any selections, however, to give an idea of the real scope

of the story, which is intrinsically one of the greatest in the world.

26. *Of the Forging of the Sword that is called the Wrath of Sigurd* is an episode in the youth of the hero, — how he obtains for himself the sword Gram, which of old Odin gave to his father Sigmund.

27. *Sigurd slayeth Regin*. With the sword which Regin the Dwarf had forged for him, Sigurd has done his first exploit, the slaying of Fafnir, the ancient Serpent who guarded the gold of the dwarfs.

28. *How Sigurd awoke Brynhild*. Having become possessed of the dwarf-treasure, the hero rides "the way of Fate" to the mountain where lies sleeping Brynhild, the Valkyr, whose fate is tragically linked with his by the will of the Norns.

29. *How Sigurd met Brynhild in Lyndale*. The hero, going his ways in search of adventure, comes to Lyndale, and there meets his love again.

30. *Of the Passing away of Brynhild*. Sigurd, in his search for adventure, comes to the burg of the Niblungs, and there gains great fame; through the guile of Grimhild, the witchwife, he is made to forget Brynhild and to marry Gudrun, the sister of the Niblung kings. Thereafter he adds to his renown, wins Brynhild for his brother-in-law, Gunnar, and is murdered through the jealousy of Brynhild, by the Niblung brothers.

31. *Of the Battle in Atli's Hall*. Gudrun has been married to Atli, king of the Eastland, but has not forgotten her husband's murder. In revenge, she instigates Atli to entice her brothers to his capital, where they are set upon by the Eastern warriors, and with their small retinue make a wondrous defence; so that the fight here recorded is the greatest fight in Teutonic legend.

32. FROM THE UPLAND TO THE SEA.

This lyric is a curious instance of the fashion in which Morris looked back upon Greek mythology through mediæval glasses. It was originally written, along with *Meeting in Winter* for *The Story of Orpheus*, which was designed for *Earthly Paradise*, but was omitted from that series. The two lyrics were then published in 1891, in *Poems by the Way*. The subject of this song is Greek, and some of its imagery, but the diction is aggressively Northern, and the spirit unmistakably belongs to the romantic Middle Age.

33. THE HALL AND THE WOOD.

First published in the *English Illustrated Magazine*, February, 1890, then in *Poems by the Way*. This poem illustrates very well the strong hold that Iceland had taken of Morris's mind in later life. The subject is mediæval, — English, perhaps — a sort of Robin Hood story, — but the simplicity of spirit, the circumstances of setting, the details of treatment, are of the Saga inspiration.

34. GUNNAR'S HOWE ABOVE THE HOUSE AT LITHEND.

The occasion of this reverent tribute to the oldest Icelandic literature was Morris's visit in 1871 to Iceland, and, in particular, to Lithend and the "howe," or burial mound, of Gunnar. This Gunnar of Lithend is a semi-historic hero in the *Njala Saga*, the best of the old prose heroic stories, and must not be confused with Gunnar, the king of the Niblungs and brother of Gudrun in the *Volsunga Saga*.

35. THE FOLK-MOTE BY THE RIVER.

This poem, first published in *Poems by the Way*, represents Morris's ideal dream of the workings of the simple political organization of Iceland in the tenth and eleventh centuries. A return to something of the same sort was in his socialistic vision of the reform of English society. The general conditions here seen working on such a momentous occasion prevail in the fascinating prose romance, *The Sundering Flood*, and in *News from Nowhere*, which is the author's dream of a future, peaceful England — a neo-mediæval Utopia.

36. THE BURGHERS' BATTLE.

Originally printed in *The Athenæum*, June 16, 1888. In spirit this is the immediate complement of *The Folk-mote by the River*. Its utterance of the stolid, grim determination of men fighting, not for glory, but for a principle, seems incomparable. The pathos of the ever-recurring burden, or refrain, is almost heart-breaking from its very monotony.

37. THE VOICE OF TOIL.

First published in a little pamphlet called *Chants for Socialists*, by William Morris, dated 1885, and bearing upon its title-page the watchwords "Agitate," "Organize." Besides *The Voice of Toil*, this pamphlet contained *The Day is Coming*, *The Message of the March Wind*, and *Down among the Dead Men*, which are included in this collection, and three other songs, written for popular tunes and of small merit — *No Master*, *All for the Cause*, and *The March of the Workers*.

The Voice of Toil was published by Morris in his *Poems by the Way*, with a single line changed — the last line of the fifth stanza, which read in the pamphlet form : —

"When our mirth is crime and our love a snare."

38. THE MESSAGE OF THE MARCH WIND.

First printed in *The Commonweal*, March, 1883. Afterwards included in the *Chants for Socialists*, mentioned in the preceding

note, and reprinted in *Poems by the Way*, 1891. In succeeding numbers of *The Commonweal*, Morris expanded this poem into a longer poem, *The Pilgrims of Hope*.

39. A DEATH SONG.

November 13, 1887, was "Bloody Sunday" for the Socialists of London. A great meeting that had been called for Trafalgar Square was broken up by the life guards and the police, and a terrific riot, verging on open revolt, was barely averted. Alfred Linnell died of injuries received in the struggle, and Morris, who had been one of the marchers in the Socialist columns, wrote this *Death Song*, to be sold as a penny pamphlet for the relief of Linnell's orphans.

40. SONGS FROM LOVE IS ENOUGH.

The three lyrics here given are selected from among the musical interludes of *Love is Enough, or The Freeing of Pharamond, a morality*, first published in 1872. The songs are made for music, and intended to serve as transitions between the different parts of the poem, which is dramatic in form and of a very intricate and carefully wrought "architecture." It is more elaborate in construction and in finish than any other of Morris's poems.

41. VERSES FOR A BED-HANGING.

Written for the catalogue of the fourth exhibition of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society, 1893. Full title: No. 200. Curtain and Vallance. Part of a bed-hanging for Kelmscott Manor, Lechlade. Woolwork on linen.

42. MASTERS IN THIS HALL.

This translation of an *Ancient French Noël* is taken from *Antient Christmas Carols*, by Edmund Sedding. In the collection it is No. 8. "The English words written expressly by William Morris, Esq., B.A."

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